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My Entire Class Has Been Reincarnated – I Became the Weakest Skeleton!

Arc 3: Heart of Nihilism

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Chapter 29: Class Meeting in a Different World #3

“The Pawns are not coming back. With this, it’s five of them.”

In an old abandoned castle, a woman muttered so. A man sitting on a tattered sofa snorted.

“We can just get any number of replacements for Pawns. Do we still have some?”

“Opening the gate isn’t free. Besides, what I’m worried about is something else.”

This castle was one of the bases secured for attacking the human forces. The humans living area in this world wasn’t so wide. At least, it wasn’t in the continent they were on right now.

It seemed humans were once attacked by various foreign enemies and were forced to huddle together. In the process, many countries were abandoned by other countries and were destroyed. This castle, which they regarded as a stronghold, belonged to a country that had been destroyed more than 200 years ago.

The man looked up at the ceiling in boredom and said.

“The Queen? I wonder why there is still no response.”

“She isn’t so obedient to the King, but it’s hard to believe she is harboring rebellious thoughts.”

“Even though she’s been gathering a bunch who’s likely to become our strength after much troubles.”

The woman put her hand on her chin and walked around the hall while being deep in thought.

“It’s fine. It wasn’t just two Knights and Bishops each in this castle, there was also that one person who was especially put here. We’ll come to see the King’s intention.”

“Ah—, yes yes. You mean that guy Zoccon. I know. I want to see the Queen

soon.”

To the woman’s worried manner of speaking, the man waved his hand dismissively. The woman wrinkled her eyebrows.

“Why is a bastard like you a Knight...”

“Rather than that, Akeno. How’s that guy? The high elf we picked up from the Catacombs.”

“We have confirmed his progress to Phase 2. Although there’s no short coming in his battle capability, it is necessary to train his mentality.”

“That’s troubling. Let’s take it easy. Do you know the story of *The North Wind and the Sun*?”

“Is it Anderson?”

“It’s Aesop. You’re pretty stupid.”

To the frivolous insult, the woman fired a mass of dark energy toward the man, the man, while lying sprawled on the sofa, flicked it off with one hand. The repelled mass of dark energy bored a big hole in the ceiling and disappeared into the sky shrouded in black clouds. The man looked at the falling dust scattered about and muttered 『*Oh boy!*』.

“Well, the places where rain will leak have just increased.”

“Who fault do you think this is...”

“It’s because of Bishop-san’s lack of patience. Akeno.”

When the man stood up from the sofa, he grandly stretched.

“Ah—, I want to play games.... Hey Akeno, next time you invite a Pawn, let’s me bring a TV and a PlayStation.”

“There won’t be any electricity.”

“Tough life. This is why hate this different world.”

Looking at the dark clouds covering the sky, it appeared to be raining soon.

The 3rd class meeting in a different world was being held in a borrowed room at the royal palace. Among the members of 2nd year class 4, excluding Kogane, Goubayashi and then Kaoruko, all names were present. Compared to the 1st meeting in the wasteland and the 2nd meeting in the dining room, the quality of the desks and chairs were first-class. Despite that though, the number of students who couldn’t sit in said chairs wasn’t a few.

On the stage was the class rep Ryuzaki. And then, Sakuma was standing beside him as the secretary.

The secretary of this class was originally Goubayashi. But since he had already disappeared when Ryuzaki pulled the class together as the class representative, it was often Sakuma who stood in that place.

Sakuma, who was originally introverted, had also grown strong after so many incidents, both in terms of combat and leadership. Given her high influential voice, the situation where she was in the same place as Ryuzaki held a very significant implication.

She was also a valuable existence who could voice her opinions against Akai Asuka, the one who was sitting in the corner of the class tinkering with her nails.

“Now then, that is everything that we’ve heard from Her Majesty the Queen of this country.”

On the stage, Ryuzaki said so while looking through his documents.

“It is indispensable that we as a class decide on our future policy once again. I want to hear everyone’s opinion.”

A commotion ran through the class.

The talk itself was very simple. *Will we ask Master Majina for a way to return to our world, or possibly continue staying here in this country forever?*

“Is Himemizu in favor of leaving the country?”

“Yeah. Very much so. What about Utsurogi-kun?”

“Well, I also think so.... How about Akira?”

“I think living peacefully here in this country would also be nice. However, I have this bad premonition since there are too many things that we still don’t understand.”

As Kyouzuke group was doing so, other classmates were also exchanging words with their close friends. This wasn’t a matter that they could make a decision just by themselves. Among them, there were also those who held unshakable determination like Kensaki, Gofunkawahara, Okumura, etc. Those people didn’t make any movements.

As for Inugami, she was lying face down on the desk, sleeping. Akai also was

polishing her nails in boredom. However, at both side of that Akai, her followers Harui and Hebetsuka were talking among themselves with serious faces. Speaking of sleeping, there was also Harao. That guy absolutely wouldn't come out of his coffin.

"I will tell you first. I intend to move proactively to search for a mean to return to our former world."

"About that, class rep, is it no good to wait for the war to end?"

It was Uozumi Sakeichiro who raised his hand and ask that question in response to Ryuzaki's words.

"Yeah. I also think that way is safest, however, when I enquired the Ministry of Magic, at the same time as we tripped over here, that thing, was it called the space-time boundary? Look like that was becoming unstable."

"What's that?"

"Isn't it some wall-like thing that separate world from world?"

Recently getting along well with Uozumi (just that she sometime sent a gaze as if looking at preys), the Cait Sith Nekomiya Miya calmly stroke her prided whiskers.

"That thing which was stable has become unstable for the last 20 years, and it seems to be easier to move between worlds right now. Therefore, it should be better if we act earlier if we want to go home."

"You mean it will become stable again if we take our time?"

"Well, it seems so."

Ryuzaki shrugged his shoulders.

The red winged devil, no, the Blood of Red Moon obviously knew something about Kyousuke and the others' trip to this different world, perhaps they were involved in it somehow.

It was unknown whether the space-time boundary was unstable due to their activities, or conversely they started their activities aiming at the time when the space-time boundary was unstable, but if the students just sat back and waited for the war to end, there was enough possibility for the boundary to stabilize and movement between worlds would become more difficult.

"Well, that Master Majina seems to be a Great Sage, so it might be possible

that we can still return to our world even if the boundary has stabilized somewhat. However, this is how I want to move after all. I will not compel everyone.”

The noises in the class got bigger.

The two choices Ryuzaki spoke of gradually took on this kind of implications. *Will we jump into this dangerous world to ensure the way back to our world ourselves, or will we accept the possibility of not returning home and stay safe in this world?*

In other words, this was a very important decision that might have a big influence on their lives from here on.

“Incidentally, how many students have already decided on their answers at this stage?”

The first person to raise her hands to that question was Rin. After that, Kyousuke raised his hands, and Akira followed suit as well. Then there were Kensaki who was sitting a different place, and Sakuma in the secretary’s seat. Hebetsuka and Harui also raised their hands. All these students would be the ones who were in favor of heading toward Master Majina’s place. A little bit later, Gofunkawahara and Okumura also raised their hands.

“Well, now that I think about it, I have to take care of the goblins of the heavy cruiser for a while.”

“Me too, I have to keep Zeku company debuu.”

Is it okay to assume that the opinions of those two are aligned somewhat with Ryuzaki’s objective?

However, it appeared that only a few other students had raised their hands for quite a while now.

“Well, I won’t ask you to decide immediately. I’m thinking about holding another meeting at a later date. However, the grace period I’m giving to everyone is one week. While it is selfish, if it takes anymore time than this, it would be better to accept living here in this country.”

Unusually, Ryuzaki’s words were harsh. Still, that might be natural as well. Supposing they didn’t establishing a deadline, things would be delayed endlessly, and they wouldn’t be able to leave this country no matter how much

time passed. Things like going back to their world would be impossible then.

“Ne~ ne~, Utsurogi-kun.”

Rin sullenly poke Kyousuke’s iliac bones.

“Utsurogi-kun, are you fine with going home?”

“That’s right. I raised my hands a little while ago, didn’t I?”

“I mean, was it because I said I will go home?”

“Eh?”

As he didn’t expect that question at all, he reflexively returned a question.

“Even at the last class meeting as well...”

“Himemizu.”

It was Akira who interrupted Rin’s words. As his words were unusually filled with emotions, Rin spontaneously jumped up and down.

“Hi~yaa~! I’m sorry, legal wife-sama! A triangular corner like myself was getting carried away!”

“No, I am not particularly angry, but...”

Rin was like a bread dough thinly stretched against Akira, who murmured a little confusingly.

I wonder what exactly was it at the last meeting? Kyousuke tilted his head. Well, let’s go home for now. I have no objections against that plan. Although it is certain that danger will be accompanying with this decision, if we put together the strength of Rin and Akira, as well as Ryuzaki and everyone, there won’t be any hurdles that we cannot overcome, Kyousuke thought. Of course, it will be a lot better if many students were to come with us.

“Mu...”

“What happened? Himemizu.”

“Iya~a, yea~h.... It’s nothing in particular...”

Rin’s voice seemed a little sulking and a little troubled at the same time. While their acquaintance was short, but when the person herself said 『*It’s nothing*』, then she wouldn’t say anything even if he were to pursue the matter. He had come to understand that much. So Kyousuke didn’t try questioning her

in particular and turned his gaze back to the front.

“If you’re hungry, how about going to a small restaurant later?”

“Eh!? It’s no good!? Well, it’s a little different but my pocket money is a little insufficient...”

“It’s because Himemizu overbought the cool-looking stones, isn’t it?”

“Because it was so cool, I just...”

In the end, the 3rd class meeting in a different world lasted a little longer after that, and then it concluded with most of their classmates having more troubles to think about. And as Rin, who was supposed to be treated to a meal at a small restaurant right after, left the meeting room along with Kyouzuke in a cheerful mood, Akira kept looking at the two of them for a while.

“Utsurogi!”

When Rin and Kyouzuke were walking in a passage of the royal castle, Ryuzaki called out to them from behind.

It had already been 3 days since the students of 2nd years class 4 came to the royal capital. They had been allowed to stay in the royal palace, but the aristocrats coming and going were still looking at them with the same flustered eyes as usual. As the Empire was gradually becoming suspicious that they were keeping monsters in the royal palace, the opposition seemed to be quite considerable.

Nevertheless, Ryuzaki negotiated with Her Majesty the Queen and managed to attach a promise to be able to stay here for a week.

“Oh, yahhoo. Ryuzaki-kun!”

“So Rin is together with you too? You’re going to eat after this?”

“Yeah! The two of us are going to a small restaurant!”

“...We must go a little bit later, or else we’re going to disturb their business?”

There were many small restaurants in the royal capital, but the ones that would receive even the monster students were limited. Although Kyouzuke group was heading to one of those, naturally, as many common citizen customers were also entering, they were told to come just at the last moment of the opening hours in order to avoid uselessly frightening the people.

“Well, it’s fine. Utsurogi and Rin also, listen to me. I have a request.”

“Request? What could it be?”

As the class rep, Ryuzaki was in a position to carry on his back heavy responsibilities, still he had been relying on Kyouusuke one way or another these days. While he didn’t think of himself as a substitute for Goubayashi, Kyouusuke still felt pretty good.

“Actually, it’s about the class meeting a week from now, but.”

“Ahh, the 4th. We must make a decision by then. I wonder how many people are going to come along?”

“According to my judgement, about 30 people are going to come.”

Ryuzaki readily said. Rin’s body bounced as she was visibly surprised.

“So much!? To gather so much!?”

“Everyone wants to go home quite a lot. Right now, they are feeling lost over the safety and balance. But still, they got the hope of 『*I may go home*』, and the choice of 『*By any chances, I may have to spend the rest of my life here*』. Probably, not many students will choose the second option.”

This was Ryuzaki who wouldn’t fall behind any other people in observing his classmates. His words had considerable persuasiveness.

“So, what is this so-called request of Ryuzaki?”

“Ahh, it’s just that...”

Ryuzaki looked around the surroundings and then softly whispered to Kyouusuke. Rin also stretched her body and listened attentively.

“I want to take all 37 of us.”

As expected, Kyouusuke stared in wonder at these words ——— *this is impossible*, at the very least, the level of his surprise was comparable to that.

“Are you seriously saying that?”

“Umm, even though I’ve stated my standpoint like that in the class meeting, I think we shouldn’t make separated decisions here.”

Ryuzaki told them that it was better to draw a united conclusion, whichever choice it should be. If they respected each individual’s opinions here, the class

would fall apart and there was no merits to it.

If they parted way with some of their classmates here, the thought of 『*Someday disagreement will break out with my other classmates*』 would be born unconsciously. Trifling friction and discord would happen in the class. At that time, they couldn't say who was going to leave the class again.

Even now, Goubayashi had already left the class. There was plenty of possibility for the atmosphere to become like that.

"I have come to understand it when Goubayashi left, but can you bear it when you have to part way with our close classmates? How about Utsurogi?"

"No, I also ... understand."

Recalling the face of a boy who was already no longer his friend, Kyouzuke then nodded.

"For example, Sugiura and Hanazono. Those two are quite close, aren't they?"

"Ah, yeah. That's right. They were already on good terms to begin with, and I feel that it becomes better after coming here."

Rin agreed to Ryuzaki's words.

The cook Sugiura and Hanazono, the one who was growing food ingredients in the home garden. There were many opportunities for them to talk because of their roles at the base, even at the class meeting just earlier, they were sitting next to each other.

"But probably, Sugiura is going to come with us and Hanazono is about to stay. If we break up here, it may very well be the farewell of a lifetime. To prepare ourselves for that, one week is too short indeed."

"If stay, everyone should stay, if leave, everyone should leave, is it something like that?"

"That's right. As for this, it is only my selfishness, but I don't want to stay leisurely in this country."

Is it about Goubayashi? Kyouzuke thought. Kyouzuke and the others had received the information that Ryuzaki's close friend, the ogre Goubayashi Genshuu had headed south a little while ago. *Of course, he will want to go and meet up with him.*

He roughly understood what Ryuzaki was trying to say.

In other words, he was trying to say that Kyouzuke and Rin should lay the groundwork for consensus in the class.

They had to persuade the students who wanted to stay in this country somehow within one week.

Kyouzuke who had little communication skills wasn't confident, but it might be possible if he worked together with Rin.

Ryuzaki floated a little self-deprecating smile.

"I am a selfish class rep."

"No, I think it's fine to be a little selfish. It's typical of humans."

"Is that so? What about Utsurogi?"

"Eh?"

When asked, Kyouzuke involuntarily raised his face.

"Utsurogi also, do you have anything you want to stick to despite it being your selfishness?"

Being told so, he pondered. *Something that I want to stick to despite it being my selfishness, and to the extent of bending the will of other people? Now that I think about it, there's nothing coming to mind immediately. If I have to say, it would be the feeling of wanting to rescue Kogane as soon as possible. However, I don't think I would bend other people's will just for that reason.*

"...There's nothing in particular."

"Really. You've changed. Utsurogi."

"But I don't think I've changed as much as Ryuzaki."

"Iya~a, I also think that Utsurogi has changed more..."

Rin said in a slightly sulking tone just like a little while ago. Kyouzuke scratched his head.

"Is that the case?"

"Such a thing, Utsurogi-kun..."

"Hmm?"

"Wel—. Yeah. It's nothing."

In the end, Rin hesitated like that and fell silent.

"Anyway Ryuzaki, I understand your request. Is it okay? Himemizu."

“Yeah. I understand what Ryuzaki-kun is trying to say, I also want to depart with everyone if it’s possible.”

“Ahh, thank you. Sorry to have detained you.”

Ryuzaki said so and laughed, then passed over a sheet of paper. Apparently, it seemed to be a list of 『*Students who are thinking about staying*』 that Ryuzaki had likely predicted. There should be around 7 or 8 people, but only about half of them were written there. *I wonder if Ryuzaki is going to take care of laying the groundwork for the other half.*

After giving a brief explanation, Ryuzaki bid farewell to Kyousuke group and left the corridor.

Kyousuke and Rin also waved their hands, seeing him off, then they decided to head for the royal palace’s courtyard right after.

The two people were enjoying their conversation about their meals after this as Ryuzaki watched them anxiously from a place some distance away.

When Kyousuke and Rin came back to the royal palace, the sun had already completely set.

The food at the small restaurant was very delicious. It seemed likely that there were many earthlings here in this country, and there were also many dishes from Kyousuke and the others’ world as well, but the most delicious had to be the pâté-like chicken paste dish. Because Rin also ordered a lot, Kyousuke’s pocket money had been completely reduced.

By the way, when eating out, Kyousuke and Rin came up with a method of eating while combined. It was a method where Rin caught and digested all the food that fell down Kyousuke’s throat. This way, the two of them could enjoy their meals properly with only a portion for one. It was at a level where they wondered why they didn’t do that from the start.

“Well then, Utsurogi-kun. Good night~.”

“Ahh, good night.”

Kyousuke waved his hands toward Rin and went back to the boys’ shared room. He had to walk a little.

Tomorrow, he, along with Rin, had to run around making the necessary arrangements. As the result of completely troubled about where to put the

sheet of paper, he decided to just roll it up and thrust it in his eye socket. As expected of the place usually used to keep the brain, the skull was quite an excellent storage space.

“Utsurogi,”

Being called suddenly, Kyouusuke turned around. *My name has been called quite often today.*

However, standing there behind him was an unexpected person.

“Akai...”

Bathing in the gentle moonlight coming through the windowpanes, Akai Asuka stood. Her eyes revealed a different kind of feelings than the usual *always being bored* kind of eyes. She wasn’t even polishing her nails. As usual, she had a tall and slim model-like figure, her back leaning against the wall, arms crossed as if embracing herself, it felt just like a piece of art.

“This is rare. You need me for something?”

“It’s not about need or anything, but...”

Akai parted from the wall, unwrapped her crossed arms and started walking toward Kyouusuke.

“For the time being, I think I’m going to talk about my blood.”

“Ah, right. That.... Owing to you I’m saved big time. Thank you.”

It was Akai’s vampire blood that resuscitated Kyouusuke’s body when it was smashed to tiny little pieces.

Since then, the skeleton body of Utsurogi Kyouusuke had become much more robust than before. Despite the fact that his bones were as easy to disconnect as usual, the bones themselves had become extraordinarily hard. It was worthy of saying so since he could withstand Rin in her compression form which was like the pressure of the deep sea itself.

“Yeah. Well, that part was only an elementary effect though.”

Akai lightly thrust a finger into the gaps of Kyouusuke’s ribs, then she turned it around and round like drawing a circle.

The blood of Akai which was soaked into Kyouusuke’s entire skeleton gathered together at her fingertip and took shape.

“.....!?”

The blood gathered at one place between his ribs beat and pulsated as if it was a heart, and then, Akai's blood started circulating through Kyouzuke's whole body.

“Perhaps, Utsurogi. You will always become stronger one stage earlier than our other classmates from now on.”

“Wh—why are you so sure about such a thing?”

When Akai pulled back her fingertip from Kyouzuke's ribs, the heart burst open and that blood once again soaked through Kyouzuke's entire body. Apparently, it seemed to be already impossible to remove that blood.

“Because what you need to move from *Phase 2* to *Phase 3* is my blood.”

Chapter 30: Red Shadow

『Because what you need to move from *Phase 2* to *Phase 3* is my blood.』

Kyousuke was doubtful of Akai's words. Her face that came very close was illuminated by the moonlight and took on a clever tinge.

This was the first time that he had ever seen Akai Asuka, one of the 3 great beauties of the class, this close. A tall and slender figure of about 170 cm. Smooth skin with no defects to be found. The more he looked at her, the more it felt like a magical beauty, something that should not exist in this world.

Kyousuke was completely unable to move and just barely managed to ask a question.

"What do you mean..."

"Well now. What do you think it means?"

Suddenly turning around, Akai proceeded 2 steps, 3 steps back.

"Hearing Utsurogi said so, you have yet to realize."

"What?"

"It's a little early to reveal the story."

Like this, Akai kept on walking on the red carpet with her leather shoes.
Akai is hiding something. It's definite with her remark just now.

*There are many things to worry about. Why does Akai know about the side effects of an ability that she has never used before? Why is it that only Akai and Inugami whose forms didn't change in the transference? Why does she know about the condition for going from Phase 2 to Phase 3? Akai must know something about these series of incidents since the field trip. That, is similar to those people who called themselves the «**Blood of Red Moon**».*

"Wait, Akai!"

Forcibly moving his body which felt like it was being bounded, Kyousuke chased after Akai.

She casually looked back.

For a moment, the pale moonlight coming through the window was stained red as if dripping blood. There was a feeling like the two of them were the only ones in this spacious royal palace. He felt a hallucination as if he had once again wandered into a new world, completely isolated from the previous one.

Peeking through the window was a red moon.

Just as Kyouzuke caught Akai's arm, she turned a sharp gaze at Kyouzuke.

"You're in the way."

Right after, a strong impact struck Kyouzuke's body. His body was blown away several meters and rolled on the carpet. Miraculously, his bones didn't become scattered. After being annoyed to anger for a moment, the look in Akai's eyes were returning to her usual lazy queen one. The aloof gaze as if lording over everything except herself was directed at Kyouzuke.

"As opportunities come, I will tell you more about it. Utsurogi only has to remember what I've said just now."

"Wait, Akai.... At least tell me just one thing."

"Can you not give me orders?"

"...Please!"

Raising his body that had finally become free, Kyouzuke lowered his head. Akai said while tinkering with her nails.

"So what is it?"

"When the base was attacked for the 2nd time, the one who defeated the red winged devil, was it ... Akai?"

"Ahh, you noticed."

Akai's lips loosened a little, drawing a slight arc.

"Or perhaps you heard from Sachi. It's fine either way."

Her word meant affirmation. *As expected*, Kyouzuke thought.

"I won't say anymore. Because it's easy to spread when more people know about it. Since I didn't have much time, I was impatient."

**Fuu*,* along with a sigh, Akai said something that was unlike her usual self. She looked up at the moonlight coming from outside the windows.

The glow of the moon floating in the night sky had already regained its usual cool light.

“You said that I’m still going to get stronger?”

“I said that, but there’s still a long way to go. Utsurogi needs to resolve your own problem first.”

“Problem? Mine? Is there such a thing?”

“If there isn’t, you wouldn’t be in such an uncool appearance.”

Despite saying that she wouldn’t say anymore, surprisingly, Akai seemed to have given out some hints right after.

However, Kyouzuke didn’t understand. *What does she mean by being in this appearance? What is my problem supposed to be?*

Suddenly, he remembered Goubayashi. He judged himself that he became an ogre because of his own inner «*demon*», and then he went off on a journey in order to face against it. *What meaning is there to my own appearance? And how the heck am I going to face against that? I don’t understand.*

When Kyouzuke suddenly raised his face, the figure of Akai Asuka had already disappeared before he knew it.

The next morning, Himemizu Rin was visiting the big public bath. The royal capital had a culture of taking morning baths. To be precise, it was a culture brought here by the transferred Japanese. It was said that many bathhouse technicians were expressly summoned from the South of the continent where there was the culture of public bathhouse, and they constructed many baths here and there in the royal palace and royal capital. *Such manga development, I have read something similar in our world,* Rin thought.

So Rin visited the grand bath of the royal palace. Basically, it was to be used by guests staying in the royal palace and the aristocrats. Aristocrats aside, when it came to guests, there was only the students of 2nd year class 4. Therefore, both the men and women sections of the grand bath had now been transformed into a bathhouse of monsters.

Frankly speaking though, Rin hated the public bath.

She didn't dislike bath itself. It was the public bath that she hated. *Bathhouses and hot springs are surely no good.*

The reason for that was extremely simple, it was because she was tormented by her inferiority complex.

At the time they were still humans, Rin learnt of her lack of development in outdoor schools. Although some of you may think it was only the development of junior high-school students at best, but among the girls who had already finished their secondary sex characteristics development, Rin's flat-as-a-cliff chest was very conspicuous. She was laughed at. It was a bitter memory for Rin.

Nevertheless, Rin still came to the bath every morning. It was to communicate with her classmates. It was the so-called naked-socializing.

However, despite all that, going to the grand bath as a slime had also greatly accelerated her inferiority complex in a useless direction.

"Are~, isn't it Surarin."

It was Sugiura Aya who first came into the bath full of steam and greeted her.

Scylla is a type of monster whose upper half is that of a girl and lower half of an octopus. The lower half of an octopus was reminiscent of a villain in a Disney movie, but Sugiura from her waist up was splendid unlike that certain villain. Rin stared at the body of Sugiura, who spoke to her in a friendly manner, from head to toes ... tentacles as if trying to devour her.

"Surarin, you like bath~. But can you wash that body?"

"Iya~, it doesn't mean I can't really wash.... But once I bath in hot water, the unnecessary waste products will come out without trouble."

"Eh, that is a breach of etiquette..."

"That's wrong!? What are you imagining!? I am not that unrestrained!?"

By the way, Rin's father and brother used to do «*that*» in the bath. When it was found out, she and her mother gave them quite some preaching.

"Ah, it's Himemizu-san. Yahhoo."

"Ah, Itomi-chan."

**Kashan, kashan*,* walking in with that sound was a girl with the lower half of a spider, it was Kumosaki Itomi.

Since the area being occupied by the lower body of Scylla and Arachne was several times that of an ordinary person, the bathhouse ended up feeling awfully cramped with just these two people lining up. Rin once again intently watched Kumosaki's body from head to toes. It was good that a slime's body had no eyes, making it difficult to tell even if she was staring as if licking all over their bodies.

"This is vexing, everyone has it good.... You have face and breasts too..."

Finally, Rin summarized her feelings with that.

Although all the students had reincarnated as monsters, most of the female students still had their face and breasts. The size and shapes were varied, but at least they were there. Sugiura's assets were abundant, while Kumosaki's were beautiful.

That's not to say face and breasts are everything. Rin's weapons when she was still human were her healthy legs. Another weapon of her was her liveliness which wasn't lost even now that she had become a slime.

However, when becoming naked in this place called the bath, Rin's inferiority complex as a girl was naturally stimulated.

"It's not really that good, is it? It's fine even without breasts."

Saying so pompously from behind was the cait sith Nekomiya Miya.

Her appearance itself was exactly that of a cat. The cat eared beast-kin didn't have such an indulgent figure. A perfect black cat. There was one different that she could stand upright but she was still mostly just a cat.

Since the bathtub would be filled with hairs if she was to soaked in it like that, she drew water into a somewhat large tub and submerged in it.

"My face is also like this. Well, this appearance «*seems*» quite suitable for my charm and I am proud of it."

"I have been thinking about it, but as expected, does Miya-chan has a lot of nipples?"

"Stop asking such a maniac question. That's enough about breasts for you."

Nekomiya's expression was openly clouded. She always came to the bath every morning even though she was cat, as a matter of fact, she simply liked bath.

“The girls whose femininity has decreased drastically was me and Miya-chan, and then who else? Totoha-chan?”

“That’s right. There’s also Kaminari. I, you and her are the three big disappointing beauties of the class. After that is Hakoiri and Kabeno ... ah no, there’s also Kaoruko as well.”

“Ah~, Kaoruko-chan~. I hope she is doing fine...”

Having reincarnated as a thunderbird, Kaminari Totoha’s body was now too big to enter the bathhouse. In the first place, everyone would be electrocuted if she was to enter the hot water, so she had been excluded from the morning bath.

Speaking of thunderbirds, the only thing Rin could think about was the puppet show which her father liked, according to the story passed down in the native Americans, it seems to be a bird of god. Even though its existence is confirmed in this world, it seems to be extremely rare, according to Selenia’s opinion, it should rival Ryuzaki in his dragon form in term of potential. However, because of her timid personality, that power had never been demonstrated. In the first place, it was lethal that the person herself was afraid of thunder.

Rin washed away the wastes products from her body, then submerged in the bathtub. She kept in mind not to absorb the hot water.

Nekomiya crossed her arms and looked up at the ceiling.

“Also, Kaminari.... She seems to be saying that she will stay in this country, doesn’t she?”

“Ah~, she was on good terms with Miya-chan?”

“We’re in the same drama club. Well, our relationship is older than that, it was me who invited her. She wanted to be an actress but with that personality, she always ended up working behind-the-scene.”

“Fun fun.”

With the eloquent story telling of Nekomiya, even just the drama club was starting to look interesting. Rin was listening to her story while responding appropriately.

“I’m going to go home. I want to be an actress. Although it may also be fine to aim to become a cait sith actress of the stage over here.”

“There’s also the achievements that had been built up as a child actor over

there.”

“It’s an old story. Just, I’m not sure about Kaminari. That girl doesn’t seem to have as much lingering attachment as I do.”

Certainly, Kaminari Totoha’s name was in the list that Ryuzaki had shown. She was one of the people who they needed to make some necessary arrangement for.

That’s right. In order to obtain such information, it was indispensable for her to socialize naked.

“Miya-chan should ask her to go home together.”

“Since I’ve been dragging her around with my selfishness up until now, I don’t want to force her to follow along now that we’re in a situation where our lives are at stake.”

“Fu~n. You’re not being honest.”

The thing called friendship is often troublesome.

“Hanazono also seems to likely stay here...”

Sugiura while submerged in the bathtub, muttered in a small voice.

I see, I see. Rin nodded. *It’s just like Ryuzaki said earlier. Everyone doesn’t want to part way with their friends.* Sugiura as well had a dream of succeeding her family’s Japanese restaurant. So she wanted to go back to their world at any cost.

But they couldn’t involve their friends who wanted to live peacefully in safety just for that dream.

That remark in consideration for their friendship, on one hand was correct, but on the other hand it was a mistake.

Rin also wanted to return to their own world. Along with everyone if it was possible. For that reason, she had to work hard after this. It was time for Himemizu Rin to display her political skill as the one who used to reigned the upmost caste of the class.

“Ne~, Surarin.”

As Rin renewed her determination, Sugiura sullenly poke her.

“Wh—what? Aya-chan.”

“The bathtub is already empty.”

“Geh.”

She had drunk everything before anyone noticed.

After this would be laying the groundwork with the staying behind group. Before that though, they needed to wait for Rin to come out from her long bath.

Kyousuke and Akira were killing time in a salon prepared for guests. When looking for something to kill time with, they found a shogi board. Was this also a product introduced by the Japanese? There were plenty of board games such as chess and playing cards. If it was shogi though, Akira would burn it, so they made it chess. Since the pieces were made of stone, there wasn't much worry of burning them.

“Kyousuke, did anything happen yesterday?”

While moving a pawn, Akira suddenly asked sharply.

“You knew? I'm beaten.”

“Obviously. How many years do you think we've been together?”

Saying what happened, it was obviously the matter with Akai. However, Kyousuke hesitated to talk about it. It seemed that she didn't like the information that she said at that time to spread around. As his creed, Kyousuke always tried to not do things that people hated.

Kyousuke remained silent for a while, and Akira finally gave a little sigh.

“Well, it's fine. You don't have to say it.”

“Sorry.”

“There's no need to apologize. This is how it has always been with you.”

It was as Akira said, Kyousuke and Akira had been together for a long time. Next to Akira who had few friends had always been Kyousuke, and Kyousuke's unreliable attitude had always been remonstrated by Akira. And then Akira would never intervene more than necessary, he always tried to respect Kyousuke's independence as much as possible.

Well, Kyousuke's halfhearted indecisiveness always made Akira angry though.

For a little while, they continued playing chess silently.

“Kyouusuke.”

Akira suddenly called him.

“The thing Himemizu said yesterday...”

“Ah, yeah? What was it?”

“You don’t remember? You...”

“Checkmate.”

“...!? Wa—wait a minute Kyouusuke! That!? When did you!?”

“You’re not good at board games as usual Akira. So much for your intellectual character.”

It had always been the case since childhood. Akira had liked special effects heroes since old time, and whenever they played make-believe hero squadron in kindergarten, he would want to be Blue or Black. And then Kyouusuke would be Red. However, he would get heated in the middle of the battalion make-believe, reaching to the point where his speech and conduct would become like a hot-blooded idiot, that was the boy named Akira.

Because Kyouusuke was like this, Akira’s speech and conduct usually made him stand out as a cool and handsome or an intellectual staff officer type, but in actual fact, his thoughts backfired quite a lot. The same was true for the case of Full Cross just recently as well. Well, that seemed to have been mixed with his hobbies a little bit.

“On—once more time. Kyouusuke, let’s play again with a rook and bishop handicap.”

“There won’t be such thing.”

When the two people were rearranging the chess pieces, they heard a somewhat loud voice coming from outside the salon. A familiar voice. It was Selena.

The princess of this country. Princess Selenade. Her tone of voice was a little tense. Kyouusuke and Akira exchanged glances (though Akira had neither eyes nor faces).

“I—is that true! Yo—you’re not serious!”

“Yes. So please keep this matter as confidential as possible...”

They were wondering how to make their appearance in such a conversation, but it was bad of her to talk so loudly in front of the guests' salon. Kyouzuke and Akira proudly walked out without any fear.

"Hey, Selena-san."

"Akyaa—"

Princess Selenade jumped and raised a scream that you wouldn't believe she was a princess.

Together with Selena was the leader of the royal knight that they often saw in the royal palace. He didn't seem to have gotten used to Kyouzuke and the others' appearance yet and was quite startled.

"I didn't hear much, but what happened?"

"No—no—nothing! There's nothing ! There is no such things as a bandit group being escorted to the royal capital stabbed to death the knights on guard and escape!"

"I see..."

"Ah! I'm sorry! Please forget about it!"

Selena shook both of her arms around and cried out, then she put both hands on the wall and dejectedly hung her head.

"Uu.... Please scold careless and incompetent Selena..."

"Well, that's being the case, please keep this matter a secret."

The royal knight told Kyouzuke group while smiling bitterly. Kyouzuke and Akira nodded.

"Understood. We won't say anything. It would be troublesome otherwise."

"Yes. It was troublesome that the escape took place not far from the royal capital. This is a story from the ordinary humans though, so it may not be so terrifying to everyone..."

"Because they can calmly kill a human, there's no reason to say it's not terrifying."

They had gotten some general knowledge about monsters of this world from Selena.

From the general perspective, it seemed that there weren't so many humans who could fight against monsters single-handedly on equal terms. Special

training and talents. Whether or not one had the ability to manipulate magic or ki. The difference in these points would create a big gap.

For ordinary citizens without any power and zero training, even a horn rabbit would be a dangerous monster to them. With just Kyouusuke walking around town was actually enough to cause great chaos.

It seemed that the bandits of this countries were mostly ruined knight apprentices who failed to become knights. Although they had some proper training, well, even a good one would only be comparable to Kyouusuke 1 person.

It's pitiful that I'm using myself as a unit to measure fighting strength, but well, it's easy to understand. Probably the fighting strength of the escaped bandits was about 1 Kyouusuke each. From the fact that they could kill humans in cold blood, their potential could be more. Maybe around 2 Kyouusuke.

“However, since they are around 2 Kyouusuke at most. If you gather several knights of this country, it won't be that difficult to catch them?”

“Akira, you're also using that unit?”

“I agree. However, although he was careless, the knight who was stabbed had strength of around 3, 4 Kyouusuke, so perhaps this will be prolonged.”

“You too, royal knight-san?”

3 or 4 Kyouusuke? These are terrible opponents. I want them to be caught soon. It feel strange now that we're afraid of a human criminal even though we have just fought against the red winged devils not so long ago, then again, there are times when such a close by hidden villain is far more terrifying than the presence of a clear enemy.

“Anyway, Anyway! I have to put out an official notice outside the castle walls.”

“Yes. We must also strengthen security around the royal capital. “

Outside the castle walls surrounding the royal capital spread a wide farmland. In this country the flood control technology had been developed, and it seemed that agricultural industry was very prosperous thanks to the irrigation channel drawn from the mountains in the North. This was not bad at all since they could get lots of fresh vegetables and river fishes.

However, the fact that the farmland was widespread meant that there were a

lot of farmers. Most of the time, the kingdom's citizens were hired to work as farmers, but there were also big landlords owning large farmlands who build their residents outside the royal capital. There was a possibility of these houses being aimed at by the bandits.

"Everyone also, must not leave the royal capital too much."

"Ah, yes. More or less, I understood ... but."

Kyousuke's reply was strangely evasive. The royal knight made a suspicious face.

"What's wrong?"

"Ahh no, it's just maybe but..."

"Utsuroogi-kuun!"

It was then that Himemizu Rin's voice came flying in desperately, she was coming along while literally bouncing **boyon boyon** with momentum.

"I found the location of Totoha-chan and Hana-chan~! That is, they're at the farming land outside the royal capital after all!"

"I thought it would be like that."

In place of Kyousuke, Akira expressed his feelings, the royal knight and Selena looked at each other.

"Did you say Kaminari and Hanazono were captured and confined by a heinous criminal!?"

A female knight with nothing from her neck up burst into the guardroom and said so, the knights in the guardroom all fell over.

This was the guardroom set up in the outer walls of the royal capital. Receiving the news that the group of bandits being escorted stabbed to dead the guarding knight and escaped, the royal palace was suddenly in a state of high tension. It appeared that as a result of the council of Her Majesty the Queen and the royal court, permission had been granted to kill instead of capture in case of an unavoidable circumstance.

There were 4 people who weren't knights there.

Kyousuke, Rin, Akira and finally Selena.

Adding Kensaki Megumi who opened the door just now made it 5 people.

“Where did the verbal message game take place and it became like that...”
“Tsurugin, that’s wrong~. Totoha-chan and Hana-chan are outside. And then, it seems that these bandits are also prowling outside.”

Kyousuke and Rin talked at the same time, Kensaki nodded 『*Mu, is that so*』, and put her own head on the table. Screams were raised in the surroundings. Dullahan seems to be on a completely different level compared to skeleton, wisp, *etc.* It seemed that many of the knights in the guardroom had seen it for the first time, and gazes filled with curiosity and fear were being directed at her.

“In any case, I cannot overlook this as a member of the public moral committee. Let me also cooperate in the search. I’ve also called Okumura and Gofunkawahara.”

“Orc, dullahan and goblin.... It is a little overboard to go against a group of bandits...”

The old knight captain muttered with a somewhat confused expression.

“Speaking of which, even Hanazono and the others are an alraune and a thunderbird after all, it seems that they would be lively even if the bandits were to attack.”

“Well, that’s right. Although that’s no reason not to go help, but in the first place, what kind of bandits would attack a place where a thunderbird is resting.”

Of course, there were many ordinary humans living outside the royal capital. Originally, Kyousuke and the others’ purpose for going out was Hanazono’s group, but if there’s a scoundrel prowling out there, they also intended to help out with the capture.

The knights of the royal capital had already begun forming patrol platoons. Moreover, it seemed an official notice had been put out to the big landlords and the farmers to return and take shelter in their home without going outside.

However, immediately after looking through a report sent to the guard room, Selena made a difficult face.

“...Perhaps, this is going to become a little more troublesome than just a bandit disturbance.”

“Princess Royal Highness, did something happen?”

When the knight captain asked, Selena nodded and handed over the report. The knight captain's face clouded in an instant.

"This is..."

"It said that the body of the knight who was stabbed to death had turned into a ghoul."

A commotion immediately spread in the guardroom. Kyousuke group exchanged glances among themselves.

Ghoul. It was an undead monster that they had seen more than enough in the battle at the fortress line just a few days ago. Speaking about ghoul, it was often thought of as the type transformed from human corpses but they didn't expect to hear that story here.

"Selena-chan, what kind of monsters the ghouls are in the first place?"

"The undead monsters are generally split into two types."

Princess Selenade, who completely became Dr. Monster, put up two fingers.

"First is the type like skeleton and dullahan, they establish themselves as an «*original*» species. And the other one are things like ghoul which was forcibly made into undead monsters by outside factors."

"Fun fun."

"There are also the kind that are resurrected by magic spells, but ghouls increase their comrades by means of infection. It's the same as vampires."

Vampires, hearing that, Kyousuke recalled Akai from last night. *Blood. Phase 3. The problem that I have.*

Various related words came to his mind and he forcibly shook his head to drown them out.

According to Selena's explanation, if someone was to be killed by a ghoul or something which carried the ghoul-factor, then that person would become a ghoul. But other than that, everything was unknown. In the first place, ghoul was a relatively new kind of monster that was discovered about ten years ago, so it seemed that the research on it hadn't progressed very far yet. At any rate, their characteristic was the high infection rate, it was said that a small village in the Empire was led to destruction because of it.

If they failed to handle it properly, something similar might very well happened

in the vicinity of the royal capital. The tension of the knights rose in one gulp.

“I see, they’re no mere bandits. If they were monsters, there’s no need to hold back.”

**Gan*,* hitting her fist on her palm, Kensaki said. Akira also nodded.

“That’s right. I, Kensaki and Kyousuke are already undead so it seems unlikely for us to get infected.”

“The question is, why did the bandits turn to ghouls all of a sudden. Were they already infected by the time the knight order capture them...”

Selena was pondering with a serious face.

Hearing that, numerous imagination crossed Kyousuke’s mind. A new species of undead monsters who increased their number by infection, then a large number of them accompanied the Blood of Red Moon. And then, how ghouls increased their number was similar to vampire.

Vampire and Red Moon. The figure of Akai Asuka who exchanged words with him last night. *Are these matching signs simply a coincident?* To connect everything together, there was still one piece of the puzzle missing.

“...Utsurogi-kun.”

“Ahh, no, it’s nothing.”

As Rin gave a worried voice, Kyousuke raised his face.

“Knight captain-san, we’re going to search for our classmates. It would be fine if it’s just common bandits but I’m worry about the ghouls...”

“Understood. Take care.”

“Kensaki, once Okumura and Gofunkawahara came, please cooperate with the knights in ghouls exterminations.”

“All right. I will search for the students if there’s free time.”

The head on top of the table nodded. Kyousuke, Akira and Rin as well nodded at each other and immediately left the guard room.

Chapter 31: Hollow

“Haa~.... It’s peaceful...”

“Yeah, peaceful—”

The alraune Hanazono Hana and the thunderbird Kaminari Totoha leisurely looked up at the sky.

The farmland spreading outside the royal capital was full of green, right now was exactly the start of the harvest season. The field spread as far as the eyes can see, and in the back were misty mountains. There was no such things as utility poles to obstruct the view, and also no cars to pollute the air. This kind of scenery wasn’t something that could easily be seen in Japan. In the blue sky, a bird that they had never seen before flew across while raising a cry like a black kite.

“It’s peaceful...”

Hanazono muttered again.

It hadn’t been a week since they started staying in the kingdom, but life here was peace itself. The time they lived at the base while trembling in fear of foreign enemies, in fear for tomorrow seemed like a distant memory now. There was also a strong sense of security since a lot of humans were around. Hanazono and Kaminari weren’t the kind of monsters with so terrifying outward appearance. In that part alone they were extremely blessed as they were different from Kensaki and Okumura who would cause screams and troubles everywhere just by going out into town. When they were looking at the farmland spreading outside the royal capital, some of the landlords accepted them when they said that they wanted to help out, this might just be thanks to their outward appearance.

“Ne~, Kaminari-san. What will you do after this week?”

“Yeah, what should I do...”

While looking up at the blue sky, they had such a leisurely conversation.

Yesterday at the 3rd class meeting in a different world, Ryuzaki made a notice to the entire class. Namely, to leave this country and return to their world, or

accept the protection of this country and live leisurely. Although it was something they had to decide someday, their classmates were unsettled. A convenient story such as living safely in this country, and then join up when the prospect of returning home was assured after meeting the sage wasn't allowed. There was also the problem of the distance from this country to the forest where the sage lived. If they were to thoughtlessly stayed here in this country, it would almost be certain that they would never ever see everyone else again.

"I, is it fine even if I don't return..."

Kaminari muttered. Strangely enough, Hanazono was also thinking about the same thing, she looked up at the thunderbird sitting next to her.

"Kaminari-san too?"

"Yeah.... I think that Miya is going to return. But I don't have that much lingering attachment to our world. That's why I'm lost."

I have no dream, not even a favorite person in mind. In that respect, I might be a little envious of Nekomiya Miya who have both, Kaminari said.

Since she had a close friend called Sugiura Aya, Hanazono also understood the story well.

Hanazono liked to grow plants. But it wasn't to the extent that you can call it a dream. When she came to this world and became an alraune, she was able to exchange words with the plants she raised. When she considered that returning to being human meant letting go of this ability, that was too lonely.

"As expected, perhaps we should remain here."

Hanazono also nodded. *Surely Sugiura is going to feel lonely. But I'm afraid when thinking that I'm going to have to live everyday in fear of something from now on.*

Shall we return to work soon? Hanazono slowly stood up. Just then, they saw a group of heavy knights rushed through the highway. As they were thinking about what was going on, the knights stopped in front of the mansion of the landlord who owned this farmland and started talking with the gatekeeper. The gatekeeper immediately backed off and invited the knights inside the mansion. The other farmers looked at each others and started talking about something, it

seemed that this was something unusual. Hanazono felt a strange uneasiness.

“Ah, Hanazono-san. That.”

Kaminari said so and pointed to the shadow of a different person running along the highway. That was an unexpected person.

Utsurogi Kyousuke and Himemizu Rin. It was the appearance of the combined form of those two (named Stream Cross). There was also Hino Akira flying right beside them.

“Hanazono, Kaminari!”

Kyousuke ran up to the two people while waving greatly. Akira was being careful not to burn the growing vegetables.

“Yahhoo, Hana-chan and Totoha-chan.”

Rin also stretched out her arm from Kyousuke’s shoulder and gave an energetic greeting.

“This is unusual. What’s the matter you three?”

“Ah~ yeah. Well a little.”

“I don’t think it’s at the point of just a little, but...”

Kaminari also was a little confused as she glanced at the other farmers. A knight came out from the mansion and spoke to the farmers, they then rushed into the mansion with blue faces.

“Did something happen?”

“Saying if there’s anything, there is.”

When Hanazono asked about the situation, Akira nodded.

“Ghouls appeared.”

“Eh...”

Hanazono and Kaminari reflexively looked at each other.

“Ghouls, that thing, from the other day...?”

“Ahh, it’s from that time.”

“Eh, but, why...”

Hanazono’s agitation could completely be felt from her voice. *Even though I*

thought it's peaceful. Even though I thought it's safe. It felt as if that assumption of her had just suddenly turned to dust. It seemed that Kaminari was the same, her eyes were shaking.

Kyousuke opened his mouth so as to continue the story.

"The reason we came here was to report about that, and then there's something we would like to talk about with you two."

"Something you want to talk about?"

"Yeah. It's about the matter of the class meeting one week from now."

It was exactly what they had been talking about. However, how Kyousuke suddenly came out with that topic was a little unnatural. Hanazono couldn't hide her bewilderment.

Her answer seemed to have been decided already. They were going to stay in this country. She believed this country was peaceful and safe, and she also didn't want to lose the ability to converse with plants. Receiving a report about the ghouls out of the blue had surely shaken her, but she was still more inclined to stay after all.

"Th—that ... we were thinking about staying but..."

"Ah yeah, I thought that would be the case..."

Kaminari said so, Kyousuke scratched his head as he was a little troubled.

"But I want you to think about it a little more. If there's any troubles or..."

"Utsurogi-kun."

Rin's tense voice interrupted Kyousuke's words.

"They've come close."

"Nn, really..."

When Kyousuke and Rin looked over, Hanazono group also turned their eyes toward that direction.

As if in a horror movie or horror game, they could see a group of living dead with partly decomposed bodies coming this way from the direction of the highway. It seemed that the knights from the mansion had confirmed it as well, leaving some people for protection, they got on their horses and headed there.

They're ghouls.

Hanazono clenched her fists tightly. The disgusting monster of death was much too unsuitable for the peaceful farmland.

It feels as if they have come just to shake our own hearts. However, if we leave this country, surely swarms of monsters even more terrible would be waiting for us. Thinking about that, her senses became more and more tense.

“Utsurogi-kun, I will protect these two. Utsurogi-kun and Hino-kun please drive away the ghouls.”

“That’s fine but.... Isn’t it better if Kaminari just escape by flying...”

“But Totoha-chan has acrophobia!”

“Ah, uh, that’s right. Sorry...”

Rin separated from Kyouusuke who apologized and slipped onto the ground. Immediately, Kyouusuke nodded to Akira, 『BLAZE CROSS!』, while matching the timing of their shouts, they combined into a single figure. While floating up into the air so as not to burn the crops with the flaring flames coming from his whole body, Kyouusuke looked at Rin from above.

“Himemizu, please take care of the rest!”

“Well, leave it to me~.”

Making her whole body into a V sign, Rin sent off Kyouusuke who flew to the group of ghouls.

“Errr—, Surarin, I, it’s thunder that I’m afraid of and not high places, but...”

Kaminari spoke timidly.

“Yeah, I know. You had no problem climbing the lighthouse on the first day of the field trip after all.”

“Then, why...”

“Because I thought that it would be difficult for Kyouusuke to persuade you—.”

Persuade. In response to that word, Hanazono’s body stiffen.

*Again, she intends to talk about the class meeting one week from now. Saying **persuade** means she intends to change our mind. Although I had a feeling but to say it so openly like that, that’s so typical of Rin.*

“Well, calm down you guys. It’s only ghouls, Kyouusuke and Akira are more than enough. However, for the sake of safety, I want to talk in a place with

water.”

From the appearance of Himemizu Rin who bounced up and down **tappon tappon**, her expression could not be read at all.

Rin group moved to a place near the flowing irrigation channel of the farmland. A little distance away, Kyousuke and Akira were kicking around the ghouls in cooperation with the knights. The number of ghouls were more than reported. It was unknown whether the report was simply mistaken or it was an indication that the victims were increasing.

If it was the later, then there should be more ghouls than just the ones here. It would be great if Kensaki group that were moving separately managed to find them safely.

In such situations, Rin was persuading the two people. It wasn't that she didn't want to do something at such time, Rin was forcibly holding it down. For Rin, the separation of her class and the increasing damage from the ghouls were equally serious problems.

Hanazono and Kaminari was clearly being vigilant while being brought here. *Well, it's natural. The way Kyousuke started the conversation is poor. Utsurogi Kyousuke is a kind guy.* Though there were various things on her mind these days, Rin wasn't going to change that recognition of him. She liked him and had also been helped many times. However, persuading these two was going to be difficult for that Kyousuke. That was why she butted in.

“Ne~, Rin-chan, what's your intention?”

Hanazono said in her usual carefree tone with some tension mixed in.

“Yeah, I wonder what's my intention is~. No, I'm not playing dumb, it's nothing much. However.”

Rin dropped her body into the irrigation channel, absorbing the water, her body grew bigger **gun gun**. In the unlikely event that a group of ghouls appeared from a different direction, she had to use her body as a shield, literally.

“Both I and Kaminari-san intend to say here, but.... You want to persuade us, that talk?”

“Yeah, that’s right. I came to push my opinion onto the two of you.”

Rin clearly said so since she had no intention of smoothing things over in a strange way.

Hanazono and Kaminari exchanged glances.

“The two of you want to stay in this country because you don’t really feel like going back to our world and because it is safer than outside, is that how you feel?”

“Do you want to say that inside of this country is not that safe?”

“Ah, you can think of it like that.”

Rin nodded while looking at the group of ghouls.

“There are small and large danger anywhere, you can say without exaggeration that no place is safe. I believe that our lives are always at risk, well, so — that — no, that wasn’t what I want to say.”

Suddenly compressing her enlarged body, Rin crawled out from the irrigation channel.

“I simply do not want to say bye-bye to you two.”

“But I don’t think we and Rin-chan are close enough for you to say such words...”

“When we go back to our world, rather than saying 『*Ah, even though not everyone is here, it’s good to be back!*』, don’t you think it will be better if we say 『*Ah, it’s good to be back together with everyone!*』 instead?”

This was Rin’s honest opinion. Even then she was firmly aware that it could be said to be a selfish opinion that she was thinking precisely because she was part of the upper caste of the class. At the time they were humans, Rin who had a bird’s-eye view of the class from a high position thought that their class was a very good class. Even though there were some students who was difficult to get along with, she thought the class wasn’t particularly problematic and that everyone was having fun.

Once she fell to the bottom and looked at things, she understood that not everything could be seen from the surface. There was a different in degrees of enthusiasm between the center and the outer part of the class. Even so, since Rin liked 2nd year class 4, she thought that she wanted for everyone to go back

together. It was self-righteous thinking that didn't consider individual circumstances. Ryuzaki's thought was surely the same.

"Beside, since our relationship isn't that good, I can say such selfish things. If it was Miya-chan and Aya-chan, they will hesitate thinking about your feelings."

It could be seen that the two of them were quite shaken when the names of their respective best friends were mentioned.

Rin had listened carefully in the bath. These were the words of Nekomiya Miya and Sugiura Aya.

Nekomiya was thinking that she wanted to return with Kaminari. *Although Kaminari lacks self-confidence and is cowardly, she has talent that shine brightly like lightning and is essentially vivid on the stage. I want to put her on the stage once everything is okay. However, if Kaminari herself said that she wants to remain in this world, then I don't have any right to detain her.*

Sugiura was thinking that she wanted to return with Hanazono. *Every time Hanazono talks about the flower bed that she grew in the gardening club when we're still humans, I think that I want to see it once we go back to our world. Together with her if possible. However, if Hanazono herself said that she wants to remain in this world, then I don't have any right to detain her.*

What they could not say because they were best friends, Rin who wasn't a best friend said it in their stead. Melt the words, digest, extract and express them in her own words.

"...that, aren't you just saying suitable words to make us feel that way?"

Kaminari also sharply attacked without concealing her wariness. But Rin didn't falter.

"I said what I said because I want you to understand. I am in this form now. The spoken words can also be changed conveniently. It's winding. Like water, it changes shape according to the containers."

While saying so, she unwound the compression of her body and greatly enlarged it. She stretched thinly, turned into a circular shape, undulated, and finally gathered back together and compressed. Kaminari and Hanazono were astonished, their gazes followed the phantasmagoric movements of Rin.

“But no matter how much its shape changes, the molecular formula is still H₂O. Even if the shape has change, the most important thing doesn’t change.”
“What is the most important thing?”

“I won’t say because the words will change if I say it. It’s the same as ultra pure water. No matter how pure the water you made, once it comes into contact with the air, something will be mixed in.”

It was Kaminari and Hanazono themselves who had to remove the unnecessary impurities and find the most important thing from the elusive words just like water.

I hope that they will find it, Rin thought.

If they decide to part with their best friends here, Nekomiya and Sugiura will surely be sad. It is painful to look at when my classmates are depressed. If Nekomiya’s spirit goes down, it will affect her battle and morale. If Sugiura’s spirit goes down, the meals she cook will become unpalatable. That will be troubling.

Well, it will be all right either way. If some more push is needed, it will be the turn of the best friends of those two.

“Well now, how is Utsurogi-kun group doing...”

When Rin looked over, Kyousuke and the others were delivering the finishing blow to the last remaining ghouls.

“”Seiyaaaa———!””

Pursuing a stray ghoul, Kyousuke’s punch cladding in flames complete destroyed it. Kyousuke’s body which had been strengthen due to Akai’s blood was supposed to be able to handle physical combat to some extent. Of course, since he had no (physical) strength, there was no other choices but to make use of speed and packing in burning heat on top of that. Nevertheless, it wouldn’t be good to damage the crops so projectiles like 『Prominence Ball』 were unusable and the increased in ability was greatly welcomed.

There were 3 ghouls remaining. The knights were confronting one of them.

Kyousuke and Akira should take down the other two.

“Blaze Crash. Kyousuke!”

Akira shouted.

“What was that!”

“It’s Prominence Drop! The thing you spread your legs’ bones and kick!”

“Ah, that.”

Kyousuke kicked the floor of the highway and jumped. Akira emitted flames from his whole body, lifting Kyousuke into the air. *The remaining two ghouls have gathered in one place nicely. We can finished them off at once with this.* Akira rearranged the shape of the bones. The shins split open vertically as if the structure of the feet had turned into a bird’s claws.

“BLAZEE!”

When Kyousuke spread both his hands and shouted, Akira strongly burst out flames from his back and instantly accelerated, aiming toward the ground.

“”CRAAA— — —SSH!!””

The flames spreading open in the shape of claws sandwiched the two ghouls’ bodies up and down, then it burned as if tearing them up and biting into them. With the spear-like bones stabbed in like that, he kicked off without pausing. Just before landing, Akira hurriedly put the bones back the way they were before. While rolling up a cloud of dust on the highway, Kyousuke and Akira landed. At exactly the same time, the knights finished off the other ghoul. With this, the ghouls in this place had been annihilated.

Kyousuke patted his chest in relieve.

“Thank you for your cooperation!”

A man who seemed to be the leader of the knights said with a salute.

“I have heard the story from Her Highness Princess, but it was as expected.”

“Ah no, well, It’s not my power alone...”

Kyousuke feeling embarrassed scratched his head.

Like that, the knights lowered their heads and left in order to hunt for other ghouls.

“As expected, something on the level of ghouls cannot stop us now.”

Akira said so, impressed.

“Ah, well...”

In the now calm place, they looked at the bodies of the ghouls rolling on the highway. It had been perfectly carbonized to the core by Akira’s flames. Taking a breather, a lot of things came to his mind. About the origin of the ghouls. About Akai. About those related to the Blood of Red Moon. And then the thing that Akai had said, Kyouzuke’s own 『*problem*』. Kyouzuke, while not shifting his gaze from the thoroughly burned ghouls, asked Akira.

“Akira, does it seem like I have some kind of problem?”

“Nn?”

“A classmate said such a thing.”

When Kyouzuke said such a thing, Akira separated from his body and lightly floated up.

“...Now. From me, I cannot say anything.”

It’s unusual of him, that pushing aside the question way of speaking. Kyouzuke shrugged his shoulders.

“I have a close relationship with Kyouzuke, so I cannot answer your question as for whether you have any problems or not from an objective point of view.”

“Does that mean I have some problems after all?”

“Is that what you think?”

“I’m not self-conscious of it though.”

Besides, even if Kyouzuke did have some problems, Akira had never failed to pointed it out up until now, not even once. It would be a strange story if Akira had been keeping silent if Kyouzuke did have some problems. Akira said no more than that to Kyouzuke.

Suddenly, Kyouzuke recalled Goubayashi who left 2nd year class 4 some time ago. Goubayashi believed that his current form reflected the «*oni*» within himself and left on a training journey in order to face it. If such a thing was also a «*problem*», it could be said that his current form also reflected the problem that he had to face.

My problem. A skeleton's problem. What the heck it supposes to be?

While he was endlessly worrying about it, Rin, accompanied by Hanazono and Kaminari, came back. *Right, there was also the persuasion of the girls. This is going to be difficult*, as he was thinking so, he noticed that Rin who was crawling ahead had a strangely triumphant attitude.

He could also see that the expression of Hanazono and Kaminari walking behind her had also changed a little.

“Utsuroogi-kuun!”

“Uwaa...”

Rin bounced up and down **boyon** and dove at Kyousuke. Like that, they ended up combining unintentionally.

“Utsurogi-kun, for now, mission accomplished. Let's go home!”

“Mission accomplished ... that, those two?”

“Yes yes. We talked about it. There isn't a conclusion yet but, ne~! Hana-chan, Totoha-chan.”

When Rin called out to them, Hanazono scratched her face a little embarrassed. As for Kaminari, she curled up that big body of her.

“Well, I'll try to think about it for a bit...”

Hanazono said in a seemingly carefree tone while floating a bitter smile.

“It doesn't mean the problem has been solved though. Well, it's not good to run away.”

“Yeah. Me too, I will talk face-to-face with Miya and make my decision after that.”

“Promptly, no matter the problem, you cannot solve it by worrying about it alone.”

Rin's voice was quite indifferent. Kyousuke would like to believe that his heart wasn't seen through, but the keyword 『*problem*』 weighted heavily on his mind. On the other hand, Rin was able to make those two change their mind and face their 『*problem*』 in such a short time, he honestly felt like praising her.

“You're great, Himemizu.”

“Eh, no. I haven’t done much in particular.”

Naturally, it was time to return to the royal capital. For now, all present headed to the residence of the landlord in order to inform the people who took care of Hanazono and Kaminari. There was no sense of tension in the way Hanazono and Kaminari exchanged words at all. They also had a somewhat refreshing expression on.

“But the few words that I’ve said didn’t work at all.”

“Nn, well ne~.... Because Utsurogi-kun’s words are...”

He suddenly stopped his legs.

“...my words?”

“No no, it’s nothing, nothing. Rather than that Utsurogi-kun, I’m hungry~.”

“There are almost nothing left in my wallet now. There is no choice but to accept and bring back vegetables from the residence.”

Following after Hanazono and the others, Kyouzuke and Rin walked. Behind them, Akira was intently watching the friendly conversation of the two people.

That evening, Rin was called by Akira. While thinking that it was unusual, she slipped out from the girls’ shared room. In the guest salon where light was out and completely dark, a lone will-o’-the-wisp faintly stood out, waiting. It might be a surprisingly convenient body to be able to be found immediately in any dark situation.

“Yahhoo, Hino-kun.”

“Ahh, Himemizu. How was it? Hanazono and the others.”

“Ah, yeah. They were having a serious conversation with Aya-chan and Miya-chan.”

Sugiura and Hanazono, Nekomiya and Kaminari, they honestly wanted to return together. Although it couldn’t be said to go to the extent of venting that feeling, but it was good to share and discuss it properly. Nekomiya, while speaking in a pompous tone as usual 『*Good grief, you’re doing something unnecessary*』, but somewhere in those words, a hint of relief could be felt. Probably, while saying one thing or another, she felt reluctant to say farewell without properly convey her feelings.

If you want to live in this world, that’s fine too. But if possible, I want to stay

with you until the last minute before parting. Of course, it's best to return together. The words of those two, both Hanazono and Kaminari had listened seriously.

“Well, I think there isn't a need to worry anymore. Is that all you want to talk about?”

“No, it's about Kyouzuke.”

Because Akira's body, which was already standing out in the darkness, flared up strangely, Rin instinctively felt frighten.

“Hiii! Excuse me legal wife-sama! I just want to be close friend with Utsurogi-kun.”

“That's not it. In any case, I called you for serious talk.”

“In my opinion this is also quite a serious talk but...”

If she was hated by the legal wife, then even a life as a concubine would be impossible. She would feel sorry to be kick out from Kyouzuke's side.

However, the words that came out from Akira next strongly stuck to Rin.

“Himemizu, today, what did you try to tell Kyouzuke?”

“Eh...”

“After 『*Utsurogi-kun's words are...*』. What did you want to say about Utsurogi-kun?”

“Eh, umm, that is...”

If Rin had eyeballs, they would be swimming in the air without thinking right then. That was by no means something she could say directly to legal wife-sama. It was something that she had tried to tell him many time up until now but hesitated to say, both because of not knowing how to say it and because it was something which could hurt his gentle heart. Much less saying it in front of his best friend Akira, that would be suicidal.

But even more surprising, Akira continued her words.

“『*Hollow*』”

“Uuu.”

“Or perhaps 『*light*』. You were trying to say such a thing, weren't you?”

Exactly bullseye.

Yes, that's how it is, Kyouzuke's words are light.

To tell the truth, Himemizu was certainly rescued by those light words. When Rin lost her way, it was those 『*hollow*』 and 『*light*』 words of Kyouzuke that illuminated a bright road for her. Therefore, Rin held quite some good-will toward that Kyouzuke.

However, it was just immediate, harmless and inoffensive response. Rin started to feel such a thing about Kyouzuke's words. While it worked well for Rin, in cases like Hanazono and Kaminari where one had already come close to have their own answer, it didn't hold enough power to change their mind in the opposite direction.

『*It's okay*』『*That's fine, isn't it?*』『*I think it's good*』. Kyouzuke's spoken words were roughly like this.

Even when he expressed a negative opinion, there wasn't any subjectivity.

"It's fine. Since I've always felt it."

Akira said in a somewhat calm voice, but it had a feeling of helplessness in it.

"But it took me ten years to notice. To notice it in just one month, Himemizu. You're great."

"Eh~, no~..."

"No need to be modest. I'm glad. There is someone who looks at that guy properly. If it's Himemizu, I can give you the Kyouzuke First-class Qualification."

"What is that unpleasant qualification."

"Sorry, it's a joke. I want to soften the atmosphere."

Akira coughed, clearing his throat.

"You probably noticed, Himemizu. Kyouzuke has no desire or individuality."

From a little while ago, she had started feeling a sense of discomfort. The first time she thought it was strange was at the 2nd class meeting in a different world. At that time, Kyouzuke asked Rin for her answer and followed it. Because he said it as if it was his own opinion, she thought that their opinions simply matched by coincidence, but that wasn't the case.

Surely up until now, Kyouzuke had always lived by seeking out the opinions of others and use it as if it was his own. That was why there wasn't any subjectivity in whatever words he said. *There is no substance. There is no truth. Therefore,*

light.

It seemed similar to Rin, but it was the exact opposite. Rin's own opinions were often changing and winding, but the essence at its heart wouldn't shake, it wouldn't change.

"So then, Utsurogi-kun, he's empty..."

To Rin's muttering, Akira nodded.

"Ahh, Kyousuke is empty. I understand well why he reincarnated as a skeleton."

"Hino-kun, you've been getting along with such Utsurogi-kun for a long time, isn't that right?"

"We've been getting along. However, considering Kyousuke now, I don't know if it's correct to call that getting along."

So to speak, ever since Akira noticed Kyousuke's problem up until now, Kyousuke hadn't show even a single change.

Akira said that he had tried various things in order to let Kyousuke gain independence. When they were hanging out, he would try to let Kyousuke do things which were popular. It had been like that ever since they were children. Letting him read books and play games. Kyousuke was more or less passionate about them. But that was all.

Books are interesting and games are fun. So even now, he continued to borrow and read only *children books*, and also ask Akira to lend out the *retro games* in Akira's house. But he didn't try to gain any new hobbies other than that. [Notes]

Rin suddenly thought of something and asked.

"Speaking of which, say, what about Utsurogi-kun's parents?"

"They passed way. In a fire."

"I see..."

Somehow, it is as expected. She felt bitter.

"I thought that he would hate me when I reincarnated into this wisp body. Kyousuke was also caught up in the fire when his parents died. For him, fire is supposed to be a symbol of thing that snatched away his happy family, but even so, he didn't reject me, he didn't hesitate in combining with me either. Much

less,”

From that point on, Akira didn't put it into words. Rin could tell, the strength of his flames were weakening somehow.

“Things shouldn't be fine like this.”

“Ahh, still...”

“It cannot be good. I like that Utsurogi-kun but I would hate looking at such Utsurogi-kun who remains empty without his own self like that forever.”

“You're right, it's painful to keep watching him like that.”

Akira nodded, just barely.

“Thank you, Himemizu. It was nice talking to you.”

“Me too. I am glad to hear an important story of Utsurogi-kun. Thank you, Hino-kun.”

“Kyouzuke is also happy. Having a friend like you.”

“Fr—friend...!”

Rin spread all over the floor with a feeling as if she dejectedly dropped her shoulders.

*Friend, friend? It cannot be helped. Fine, I'm going to make a blatant appeal. But well, I'm good. Even if I want to become such an existence to Kyouzuke in his current state, he would doubtlessly says something like 『**Really, all right then**』. Light words with no substance.*

No, since he averted his eyes from Saa-chan's body, he could be tempted somehow, doesn't he?

“Well, I think it's fine. I will do my best as a holder of Kyouzuke First-class Qualification. Legal wife-sama.”

“I'll say this once, but Himemizu.”

Akira said in a somewhat puzzled state.

“Oh? What what?”

“The feelings I hold for Kyouzuke are not romantic feelings or the like.”

“Lies.”

Chapter 32: Countdown

That day, Kogane was finally allowed free movement in the old castle. *I've been locked up in jail all this time, and everyday I felt like my mind is going crazy, but perhaps I should think that it was good enough I wasn't killed.* Kogane aimlessly wandered in the old castle alone.

This castle stood in a densely grown forest. Looking outside through the broken windows, he could see a ruined townscape among the trees. The town was destroyed a long time ago, the trees grew there and a forest was made. It appeared to be such a place.

As far as Kogane knew, the area around this castle had never seen the blue sky. Heavy and dark clouds covered the sky like a dome and it often rained. *Like this the tree will grow well,* Kogane thought.

I wonder how everyone in my class is doing? That red winged devil — — — no, he called himself Pawn, didn't he? That Pawn said that he would attack the base again. Was everyone at the base safe when he attacked?

In the end, I missed the chance to apologize to everyone in the class.

While we're still alive, I want to say a word of apology at least.

While walking in the old castle with a depressed feeling, he felt nostalgic for some reason. But then, he heard something in the direction of the reception hall in this castle where no sound could ever be heard.

“.....?”

Kogane felt suspicious and opened the door. In the center of the reception hall, a single man was sitting on a torn up sofa.

Rather than a man, he was a boy. Body build was slight good, although there were many aggressive parts in his facial features, his looks itself seemed innocent. Most of all, he was wearing a gakuran.

Gakuran. Why are you wearing such a thing? And, Kogane stopped thinking. Rather than that, the thing that the boy held in his hand was more shocking.

A video game controller. Is that a PlayStation?

That wasn't everything. The controller was properly connected to the game

console, and the game console was connected to an LCD TV. And then the game console and the LCD TV's power cords were extended to a big machine that he had never seen before.

He is playing video game.

Kogane's understanding couldn't keep up. *Wasn't this a different world?*

Nevertheless, he entered the hall and went around the back of the boy to check the screen. The boy was playing an old game released more than 15 years ago. Looking at the floor, lots of game softwares of the same era were piled up.

"Yo, high elf."

The boy said so without looking away from the TV screen.

"Ah, umm.... Suou-san, was it...?"

"Ou. Knight Suou. Suou Takashi is also fine."

A curt manner of speaking as if spitting. He's the type that I'm weak against, thought Kogane.

He was the same type as the hateful bad students who extorted money from Kogane when he was in 1st grade. Namely, a yankee.

He wanted to quickly get away, but the presence of the TV and the game console in front of him wouldn't allow it.

Kogane's eyes couldn't break away from the items reminiscent of his homeland.

Staring, he kept watching Suou played.

What Suou was playing was a portable version of a gothic horror action game released by Konami in 1993. [Notes] He had seen Kyousuke played an older version of this game sometime.

Indeed, it was a game full of appropriate ambiance to play in this castle with its devil castle-like appearance.

However,

"Oh shit...! I died again!"

Suou was bad.

There was also the fact the difficult of this game was originally high. But more than just that, his play was fatally lacking. He couldn't master even the most

basic movements such as jumping.

Kogane unintentionally muttered.

“Completely shitty...”

“Aaan!?”

Suou bared his fangs just like count Dracula, threatening Kogane. Startled, his body reflexively trembled.

“What the hell, you. Well then, let’s see how you fare.”

“Eh, y–yeah.... It’s fine but...”

Kogane took up the controller which was bluntly thrust toward him.

Although I said it’s fine but will I be able to do well? Kogane’s specialty was full-fledged 3D action games, starting with FPS. A game like this was more or less Kyouzuke’s specialty instead.

No, well, I can do better than Suou. With a carefree feeling, he started the game.

It’s been a long time since I last touch a controller. Although he hadn’t touched a game controller for quite sometime even when he was human, the feeling of plastic fitting in his hands were nostalgic. The feeling of the start and select buttons made of rubber was also like that.

For a while, Suou sat on the sofa while watching the TV screen with a sour look, but when Kogane successfully defeated the boss of stage 1, he leaned forward.

“You’re good.”

“Re–really.”

It felt like it had been a long time he was last praised. Kogane, even while being surprised at himself, smoothly cleared the stage. *Could it be that my dynamic vision and reflexes have been enhanced by becoming a high elf? If that’s the case, I want to play FPS in this form all the more.* Kogane who once experienced a complete defeat against a friend, now wanted to challenge that guy again.

In the meantime, he had already rushed into the last block of the stage 8.

Before they noticed, a few hours had already passed. Suou was completely

absorbed in Kogane's play, he sometimes uttered words of admiration such as 『*incredible*』 and 『*not bad*』.

Now, before the Player Character was the last boss, Count Dracula stood in his way. Suou's eyes were shining.

"Is this guy the boss?"

"Yeah."

Kogane answered briefly and handled the controller without any slight shaking. Suou also swallowed his saliva and said no more. In the reception room of the old castle, only the sound of the game coming from the TV and Kogane hitting the buttons **clack clack** could be heard.

"Ahh..."

Because of tension, his fingers slipped and he made a regrettable mistake. A little impatience, he continued committing several blunders and his Life Point kept decreasing.

In the end, Kogane failed to defeat Count Dracula at the very last moment and he got a game over.

"Ah.... Sorry..."

"It's fine it's fine. Don't mind it. You're quite good. What's your name again?"

"Kogane. Kogane Yoshiki."

"Kogane? I will welcome you again. I'm Suou. Suou the Knight."

Since Suou suddenly presented his hand, Kogane tried to grasp it in return, but he was confused as that was a clenched fist.

Thereupon, Suou finally laughed and made Kogane's hand into a fist, he bumped his own fist against Kogane's like that, after that he bumped it from above and finally from below.

"What's this?"

"A friend greeting. Nice to meet you."

Suou smiled grinningly with his white teeth. As expected, his sharp fangs looked awfully conspicuous.

Looking at that Suou, Kogane was reminded of Utsurogi Kyousuke for some reason.

When Kogane said 『Sorry』, Suou answer 『*it's fine it's fine*』 without minding it at all. *I don't think that I will be forgiven even if I apologize for the things that I've done to the class. But if it was Kyousuke, I feel that he would give the same response as Suou.*

The 4th class meeting in a different world ended safely. With Ryuzaki and Rin skillfully laying the groundwork, all 37 people decided to leave the kingdom. When he went to inform Her Majesty the Queen of that, she smiled sweetly and responded 『*Let us respect your courageous decision*』.

Kaminari and Hanazono had also firmly decided to follow along as a result of talking it out with their close friends. From Hanazono, *while I'm still troubled whether or not to return to being human, at least, my thought and feelings are the same as Sugiura's in that I want us to stay together until the very last minute*, that was her honest answer. They were going to act together until they arrived at the eastern forest where Master Majina lived.

By the way, at the 2nd class meeting, Kuremori had said 『*Going back to our world is on hold*』 but the day after the 3rd class meeting was over, he said 『*Whether or not to return is on hold, but I will take care of the heavy cruiser*』 and went back to the fortress line in the West. For a week since then, it seemed that he had been maintaining the heavy cruiser while helping out the reconstruction of the fortress line at the same time. The knights of the fortress line also helped out quite a lot, and the reinforcement seemed to be going well.

Well, it appeared that the crisis of breaking up the class was avoided for the time being. In the royal palace's great dining room, Kyousuke group were having their last royal capital meals while patting their chest in relieve.

“Geez, making the record of proceedings is really tiring...”

While Sakuma was nibbling on a bread, she summarized the contents of the 4th class meeting.

She had gathered a complete set of easy-to-move clothing in this kingdom. As a result, there were many voice of grief about her greatly diminished level of exposure outfit.

“Is that so? it's a secretary thing...”

Kyousuke nodded seriously. Kyousuke and Rin were currently eating in the

combined state. As the meals themselves were served for 37 people, Rin was delighted to be able to eat the share of 2 people.

“Saa-chan may also be busy, but please come hugging Utsurogi-kun once in a while.”

“Eeeh!? Wh—what are you saying Himemizu-san!”

“But it’s impossible for me alone, if Saa-chan clings to Utsurogi-kun while naked, he may be able to regain his desire.”

“...!?”

“What was that about regaining my desire...”

Kyousuke also got confused by the crazy words that Rin had suggested. Sakuma too, her face also turned bright red, she was fidgeting bashfully and murmured 『*Utsurogi-kun’s desire...*』. *This trend doesn’t seem to be any good.* However, Rin didn’t say a word about the true intention behind her words and he couldn’t understand their meanings in the end. She just silently digested the chicken paste. While Kyousuke was tilting his head, he reached out for the remaining parsleys but his arm stopped as if it was paralyzed.

“Hmm...?”

“Utsurogi-kun, I hate parsley!”

“To think that there is something that you cannot eat, this is pretty shocking, but.”

Even though she’s a girl who eats even shrimp shell and potato skin.

“I quite like it though.”

“Parsley!? This is the first time I see someone who say that they like parsley as a side dish!”

“Well, if Himemizu hate it, then it’s fine.”

“DO NOT GIVE UUUUPPPP!!”

Rin raised a big voice all of a sudden and the gazes of the class were all directed over here.

“Hi—Himemizu!?”

“Why did you give up!? Don’t you like it, parsley! Do not say 『*I like it so I’m going to eat it separately*』 or something like that! What about it! What of the others! If you like it, show a bit more guts!”

“What, what’s wrong Himemizu! You are a little funny today!”

“It’s not only me that’s funny today! Is it not the case that you’ve been funny since forever!”

Saying so, Rin’s body stretched out like a tentacle from around Kyousuke’s shoulders. The extended arm grabbed the parsleys and tossed them into Kyousuke’s mouth as is. A refreshing bitter taste passed through his throat, then they immediately flopped down onto Rin’s body.

For a moment, thorn-like things stood up on Rin’s entire body, shortly after that, sweats started flowing like waterfall. *No, this is not sweats. It’s tears.*

“Uuuu ... Utsurogi-kun~, pa–parsley ... is deliciouss...!”

“Himemizu...?”

Although her eccentric behavior didn’t start just now, he was still a little worried watching her.

“Eh, umm. But, umm, well, it’s good that everyone in the class has united together!”

Looking at this situation, Sakuma was confused, so she changed the subject a little forcibly.

“Yeah, it’s good. It’s very good.”

Rin murmured with a voice that was still somewhat tearful.

“We have united, or should I say, everyone’s ill will is slowly disappearing.”

“Everyone’s ill will?”

“Seem so. Since Utsurogi-kun and Hino-kun are lovey-dovey, you didn’t know. But I feel that the cracks are slowly, slowly being mended compared to the beginning of the trip.”

Sakuma was also nodding **un un**. Certainly, she might be an easy-to-understand example. Before the trip, there didn’t seem many students in the class whom she was on good term with (actually, she had a surprising friend called Akai), but after coming here, her circle of friends had been spreading well, from the class rep Ryuzaki, Kagoi who was on the same team, the team leaders Kensaki and Uozumi, to Akai’s followers Harui and Hebtsuka, in addition to the lone wolf Inugami.

The girl who reigned at the top of the class caste for the first time said something like 『*Since the class is such a small group of people after all—*』.

Well, in fact, the mood of the class was getting better than before. At least, the strained atmosphere like the first week after the trip was no longer. There was also the fact that everyone got some leeway now.

“He—hey ... oi. We’re going at this timing...?”

“What are you saying this late in the game. It was Washio who said to go.”

“Don’t be hesitant. That’s not manly.”

“Yea. Hang in there you three. Have some guts. I’m rooting for you.”

Suddenly, Kyouzuke heard such a conversation from behind. Kyouzuke turned around, and Sakuma who was sitting opposite of him, shifted her posture in order to peek behind his back.

What there were three people, Washio, Shokuzura and Hakuba. Behind them stood the public morals committee member Kensaki with her arms crossed. Washio who was leading ahead looked awkward and hesitant for some reason. Noticing the gazes of Kyouzuke group, he breathed a sigh and stepped forward after making up his resolution.

“Y—yo, Utsurogi...”

“Ah, right.... What’s the matter? Washio. You’re being formal.”

“No that..., it’s just. Umm...”

In the background of Washio group, Kensaki was making a guts pose. *Is there any meaning in that?* Kyouzuke didn’t know.

Behind Washio who was speaking hesitantly as if embarrassed, Hakuba floated a bitter smile.

“We came to apologize to Utsurogi.”

“To me? For what?”

“The thing in the corridor of the base, and the thing in the dining room.”

Ahh, and Kyouzuke recalled. *Speaking of which, their mood was considerably dangerous at the start. Especially Washio, he aggressively tried to pick quarrels. At the time of the disturbance in the dining room also, they broke me apart.* After that, Washio and the others were treated coldly by the class since they were formerly parts of Kogane’s clique. Nevertheless, Ryuzaki’s team formation

had been successful and they gradually made friends with everyone as before.

“The atmosphere of the class is getting better. Having traveled together, I understand that Kyouzuke is a good guy after all. Because you will forgive us if we apologize, I proposed to do it properly.”

“As Washio’s team leader, I also wholeheartedly agree.”

Said Kensaki while proudly crossing her arms.

“But Hakuba has already apologized.”

“Washio and Shokuzura are not being honest.”

Saying so and Hakuba went forward and carefully lowered his head to Kyouzuke.

“Sorry. Utsurogi.”

“I, I’m also sorry. That is, I don’t have a head to lower, but anyway, sorry.”

Following Hakuba, Shokuzura dropped down all his tentacles on the floor in place of lowering his head.

“Ah—, nn—. Uh, that is...”

Lastly, Washio looked away awkwardly as if trying to be shy, then he finally breathed a sigh and lower his head.

“I was wrong, Utsurogi. Sorry, forgive me.”

“Ahh, yeah.”

Kyouzuke nodded.

“I don’t really mind. Please raise your head.”

With those words, they had reconciled for the time being. From around Kyouzuke’s shoulders, Rin suddenly stretched out her hands and started clapping **pachi pachi**. Following that, Kensaki and Sakuma also applauded. Washio made a relieved expression and looked at Hakuba and Shokuzura. Since Shokuzura had no face it was difficult to understand, but he probably was feeling relieved like Washio.

“Well—, to be able to forgive anything is one of Utsurogi-kun’s good points...”

Rin while applauding faintly muttered.

“What is it Himemizu. That way of speaking that contains some hidden meanings.”

“Nn—n. It’s nothing. I also think that the matter this time is fine like this.”

“But Akira would get angry saying that I’m too good-natured.”

“Softhearted is also fine. Maybe.”

If examined carefully, he could see that there was some nuances in Rin’s words. *Softhearted, there is a fine line between softhearted and something not so.* Although it would be a lie to say that the continuation of Rin’s words didn’t bother him, Kyouzuke didn’t ask her about it in the end.

Kyouzuke and the others finished their meals, then they went toward the fortress line in the West despite feeling reluctant.

What are we going to do now? Ryuzaki explained that they would board the heavy cruiser and head for the mountain range in the South. South of here, there was a ruined country that was destroyed hundreds of years ago, heading east from there and they would reach the sea soon enough. This was the route taught to them with few encounters with the humans in order to escape the Empire’s eyes.

However, if they went along the coastline, they would come into the territory of the Empire before long. According to Her Majesty the Queen’s proposal, they should aim at the eastern side of the continent by going offshore, passing through a maritime nation where the Empire’s hands wouldn’t reach.

『*You gotta be kidding me! Even though the bottom of the ship has already been fitted with caterpillars!*』

Hearing that, Kuremori shouted so. Still, whether they would refit the heavy cruiser to be seaworthy, or find another way of crossing the sea, they would think about it when the time came.

“By the way, Ryuzaki, isn’t it dull to say heavy cruiser, heavy cruiser all the time?”

They were loading the necessary supplies that were kindly offered by the kingdom onto the heavy cruiser. Since the goblins, skeletons as well as Zeku were giving a hand, the work progressed at a quick pace.

When Ryuzaki heard those words, unusually, he smiled boastfully and pointed

the nose of his dragon-kin face toward the bow section.

“Ahh, I have tentatively given it a name.”

“Let’s see.”

Written over there was 『*Municipal Jindai High-school Other World Branch*』.

“...Ryuzaki, should I say you’re truly the class rep for having such a strong sense of belonging to the school.”

He thought it was a good thing though, Kyousuke climbed up the gangway lowered on the ground.

A large hole was opened up in one part of the deck, and it was filled with soil. Hanazono cheerfully jumped at it. She wanted to plant the seeds from the farmland around the royal capital that were kindly given to them. Sugiura also, after she brought in a large amount of cookwares into the ship’s kitchen, she helped out with working hard at gardening.

The bottom of the «*branch school*» ship had been remodeled considerably. It certainly was impossible for it to float on water like this.

Also on the deck, main battery and machine guns were arranged in a way that wouldn’t interfere with Hanazono’s home garden, and the goblins were carefully polishing them. They were dealing with such firearms, and Gofunkawahara who assumed their boss seat had received an incomprehensible job title of 『*Goblin Interpretation committee member and Firearms Regulation committee member*』.

Two catapults powered by gunpowder which were probably for launching ship-borne planes were also fixed firmly. It seemed likely to be used to launch Ryuzaki and Kaminari. If they were to flap their wings on the deck, it might very well blow away the goblins at the gun turrets and Hanazono’s vegetables, was how Ryuzaki explained.

“Everyone~!”

While swinging her hands and running **bata bata**, Princess Selenade came to see them off.

Although she had been given attendance number 41, as one would expect, they could no longer bring along the princess of a country. It would be farewell with her here. So that Kyousuke and the others could move around easily, she was

saying that she wanted them to leave it to her to make the necessary arrangements with each countries. *In order words, we shouldn't expect too much.*

However, she was knowledgeable about information of monsters and this world, losing her would be a serious blow indeed.

“Selena-san, we’ve been indebted to you until now.”

“Don’t mention it Utsurogi-san! It was us who have been taken care of until now. From now on, it’s our turn to assist everyone from the shadow.”

Coming later after her, several knights were carrying in a large amount of wooden boxes. Ryuzaki tilted his head.

“What’s this?”

“This is my gift to everyone. Please take a look.”

Saying so, Selena opened one of the wooden boxes. There were many bundles of paper stuffed inside.

“Please look! I’ve written down as much as possible about the ecology of this world monsters. This is Selena Memo.”

“Oh, OOOH...”

Kyousuke and Ryuzaki involuntarily leaked a voice of admiration together. *Even if it’s called wooden box, each side of it is close to 1 meter in length. I wonder if all this memo is Selena’s handwriting. I thought that she didn’t show up much last week, but could it be that she has been writing this all along?* Looking closely, there were dark circles under Princess Selenade’s eyes which were completely unbecoming for a royalty like her.

Again, the knights slowly put down a box that was somewhat smaller than the wooden boxes.

“That’s not all. Here, my thesis and some of the hypotheses obtained by enquiring the rare species scribing team of the Empire.”

“Hypothesis?”

“It’s about everyone’s Phase 2 abilities. Simply put, what is the possibility for this world monsters to manifest unique abilities? What kind of abilities that will potentially manifest? The rest is about the Blood of Red Moon. There are also some opinions of the Imperial Magic Ministry and Imperial Knight Order in here.

Well, please read it yourself once you calm down. I worked hard!”

Flipping through the pages, there seemed to be series of unintelligible sentences in this world language. However, Japanese translation were carefully put below each and every one of them. The handwriting wasn’t just one person’s. As they thought that Selena and Her Majesty the Queen wrote it, more than just those two, there seemed to be the hands of great many people added in.

“Although they couldn’t meet with everyone, the Japanese who settled in this country have also help out a bit.”

“They are not going back?”

“They don’t feel like going back, or cannot go back.... It’s not only trippers who came to this world, there are also reincarnators who jumped here with only their souls, such people cannot go back to their world.”

It was said that they couldn’t come into contact with Kyousuke and the others because the political scene was also making a big fuss. Some nobles had strongly opposed against keeping monsters in the royal palace for a while, and it seemed that there were many cases where interests in the different world knowledge would involved the trippers and reincarnators.

Under such circumstances, Selena slipped through the eyes of the opposing faction and requested the Japanese people for cooperation, and they said that they would help out their fellow compatriots.

“Such a thing.... I’m happy, this kind of things.”

Ryuzaki said with a slightly tearful voice. Kyousuke also nodded.

“Thank you, Selena-san. It’s a great help.”

“Eh, eheheh.... It’s fine~. This is all that I can do.... Eh—heheh...”

The knights brought the documents prepared by Selena into the ship. Selena was scratching her cheek with a smile, but the liveliness in her voice gradually died out and she hung her head.

“Umm, I won’t say farewell to everyone.... Because I’m going to see you again...”

“Nn, yeah...”

“But I, I am glad to have met everyone. Although the time I spent as a member

of 2nd year class 4 wasn't long, and I kept being a nuisance, making everyone angry, but it was fun..."

"Yeah..."

"Well, well then, since that's all! See you!"

Selene suddenly raised her face, then after giving a salute, she immediately turned around and ran away.

"She was a storm bringing transfer student..."

Ryuzaki muttered a little.

"Well, since she is a princess. Also known as tempest summoner." [Notes]

Kyousuke also chimed in.

It was almost time to depart. Kyousuke climbed up the gangway together with Ryuzaki.

"...then, such a thing happened..."

"Fu—n. And then, you didn't apologize..."

Kogane was sitting on the sofa alongside Suou and playing a fighting game against him. Initially, Suou just hit the buttons randomly, but gradually he memorized the Surge Fist command, then memorized the Rising Dragon Fist command, and now, he had grown to the point of being able to exchange technique with Kogane. Since his dynamic vision and reflexes were both above Kogane's and the actions completed in just a few frames, Kogane couldn't take him lightly even if he was an amateur.

And then, Kogane had confided his trouble to Suou. Although it might not be a story he should tell to the company of the guy who kidnapped him, but he wanted to get it off his chest.

Somehow better at reading the opponent, Kogane controlled his character and took back the 2nd round from Suou. *It's 7 wins in a row with this. Just barely, I managed to keep my dignity as an otaku.*

Dropping his line of sight to the floor, other than game softwares, there were also various documents rolling around. All were in Japanese. It seemed likely to have been printed by LibreOffice Impress. When Kogane looked at them vaguely, 『*Transference Denaturation Gate Summary*』, 『*Ghoul Virus Summary*』,

it said that all of these were written by an author named 『Akeno Miyabi』.

“Well, in this case, it’s gonna be fine if you want to apologize.”

Putting his controller on the sofa, Suou looked up at the ceiling.

“Is everyone alive...?”

“Alive and well. Probably though. Five Pawns also didn’t come back...”

This was good news for Kogane. *Everyone of the class is alive? But, is Kyousuke among them? That guy crushed his body into tiny little pieces. If Kyousuke fell apart, they can fix him, but what about the case where he is shattered to tiny fragments?* Kogane didn’t know.

However, Suou again said something surprising.

“Besides, the chance for you to apologize is gonna come soon.”

“...Why?”

“That’s right, you, it’s because winning over all of you as comrades is our purpose.”

Suou looked at Kogane’s face and grinned.

“You guys came to this world to become our companion.”

Chapter 33: Force Encounter

“Soliciting that high elf as a comrade is looking positive?”

Akeno made a puzzled expression.

“Whatever brought that on? My training just frighten him, but all you did was talking.”

“I told you so. The North Wind and the Sun.”

Even though Suou was sitting on the sofa talking carefreely, Akeno’s expression was clouded.

“Since you can befriend him, then befriend. Since he probably doesn’t hate us in particular. Make him know that there was just a little unfortunate misunderstanding and he will cooperate.”

“U—mu, I don’t understand...”

“As before, Akeno, you’re pretty stupid.”

Akeno instantly glared and fired off a ball of black energy at Suou, but he flicked it off with one hand. It was the same exchange as usual.

Of course, if the Bishop Akeno was serious, the likes of Suou would have turned into cinders. So it could be seen that she was holding back to some extent.

These past few days, Suou had been playing video games with Kogane the high elf. Although the television and the game console as well as the big power generator were originally brought using the chance when replenishing the Pawns in order to kill time, they had unexpectedly also served as communication tools to connect with Kogane. Kogane had gradually opened his heart to Suou, and he was completely frank now.

Kogane said that he wanted to apologize to everyone by all means. That wish of his would come true. There was a slight delay in the plan and they would like to confirm the unnatural movements of the Queen, but there were no obstacles in general.

“So, are those guys still in the Promised Cemetery?”

“I don’t understand. Although the last Pawn headed there did give some information, in the end, that Pawn didn’t come back.”

“Well, for now, I’m gonna take Kogane there and have a look.”

If a Knight was to go there personally, the Queen should also give some kind of response.

It isn’t a bad deal for them in particular. Once they are transferred to this world in such forms, and they cannot to return to their world, cannot to return to their original forms, they’re likely to give up before long. If they swear allegiance to our side, we won’t make it hard for them. There are video games after all. Because the Queen is being silent, we have lost 5 Pawns. That in itself is annoying, but it’s not like her selfishness has just started now. In the former world, she only listened to the King, so it’s unthinkable that she will rise in revolt. In any case, they’re going to submit to us.

“Other than that, Suou, there is one worrisome information.”

“Hmm?”

“The appearance of the ogre in the previous report was confirmed again in the vicinity.”

“Ahh, was it the missing guy in that class?”

Akeno nodded silently.

It was the reincarnated ogre who fought against one of the Pawn before. Because he hadn’t sworn allegiance to this side, it was unavoidable that it turned into a fight. Although he had considerable combat ability, he wasn’t the Pawn’s opponent after all and was drove into an impossible battle. The Pawn tried to bring him back as is, but he was being chased by two strategic class knights from the fortress line and had to give that up.

“I thought he died a dog’s death somewhere but to be still alive.”

“That’s not all. His progress to Phase 2 has also been confirmed.”

“Hoho—u...”

Suou slightly narrowed his eyes.

“Ogre’s Phase 2.... What kind of patterns were there...”

“Generally, it would be something among the line of 《Regeneration》 and 《Body Strengthening》, but what that individual acquired is probably 《Fighting Spirit Awakening》.”

“Sometime.... You win, you win big. I say the skeleton’s 《Characteristics

Amplification》 is also good for us.”

The fact that he acquired 《*Fighting Spirit Awakening*》 in Phase 2 meant that once he reach Phase 3, he should be able to display combat ability equal to Bishop class at the very least, or possibly even reach Rook class. Of course, since the plan of using the Transference Denaturation Gate was put into practice for the first time, all of these were just theories in the end.

In the first place, since the developer of the Transference Denaturation Gate was that person, there were various parts that weren't trustworthy. *But well, you can't succeed if you're afraid, there shouldn't be any fatal problems even if we apply an empty theory into practice.*

“In any case, I want to add that reincarnated ogre to our ranks by all means.”

Suou rose up from the sofa and fixed the gakuran he was wearing.

“Are you going out?”

“That guy is around here, isn't he? Let's catch him quickly. I'm also taking Kogane.”

“In that case, I'm going too.”

Akeno also followed behind Suou who was trying to leave the hall. Suou looked back and wrinkled his brows.

“That's fine but, Akeno, your endgame is usually weak...”

“Don't worry. I want to do some experiments since the new magical beast is completed.”

“That line is most worrisome...”

A few days had already passed since they left the kingdom.

The heavy cruiser, renamed «*branch school*», had come out of the kingdom territory, and started moving into the mountain range as originally scheduled. Since it went on rough unpaved land, it shook excessively. People such as Akira all ended up got seasickness (they were on land though). Some students probably forgot about it completely, but that guy was weak against vehicles. It seemed that didn't change even when he became a wisp and lost his semicircular canals.

Including Zeku, all of 38 classmates single-mindedly aimed for the ruined kingdom. Among them, the topics of Goubayashi occasionally came up.

It's good that the class have a sense of solidarity and has made a decision to look for the Sage in the East, but there are still missing classmates before all classmates are gathered. Apparently, it seems that Ryuzaki has received some information on Goubayashi, and this route to the South is also to look for that Goubayashi, or so the rumors among the students.

But well, rather than rumors, it's the truth.

Problems like when Goubayashi left the class are no longer. Goubayashi, have you also settle your problems already? There were some nostalgic talk in such a manner, but there were also some worrying conversations about the doubtful fact that the eyewitness report only mentioned Goubayashi, *then what the heck happened to Kaoruko who was supposed to have left the base with him?*

The class has united after much troubles. If it's possible, I want all of us to join up together once again.

Such a mood was born in the class. There was no one who assertively mentioned his name, but in many cases, Kogane was also included therein. Well, some students also said that if he came back and apologized, they would let it be water under the bridge.

After all, for people who weren't directly related, the bad memories seemed to be fading. Putting aside whether such a thing was good or bad.

“NNUAAA———!!”

Well now, in this situation, the one who was wholeheartedly troubled was this slime girl, Himemizu Rin.

“I don't know! I don't understand! I researched desperately in the past few days, but all I got is just that!”

On the paper in front of Rin's eyes, only the words 「*Favorite food: parsley*」 were written.

“We—well, but, say, Himemizu-san is amazing.... I didn't know Utsurogi-kun's favorite food...”

“But even if I know that, it's still useless.... Right now, I have asked Hana-chan to grow herbs similar to parsley, but.”

The place was the dining room. Sitting next to Rin was Sakuma who was wearing a girlish one-piece today.

Rin thought for a moment, that it would be nice to be fashionable.

Currently, Sakuma was cooperating with Rin in place of Akira who had become completely groggy due to seasickness. As named by Akira 『*Kyousuke's Desire Liberation Party*』, this gathering's purpose was to remind Utsurogi Kyousuke of what he wanted to have, what he wanted to do and such things, by thoroughly investigate the things that he liked.

“Maybe, since he is interested in girls to the extents of averting his eyes from Saa-chan, I think that he must like boobs.”

Rin added to the paper 『*boobs*』, making it a list.

“And then, about what to do when Utsurogi-kun's ero ero demon awaken.... I'm thinking...”

“Ye—yeah.... That's right...”

“Saa-chan, just now you were thinking that 『*but still, it maybe good*』, didn't you?”

“Eh, eeehh!? I didn't think that!?”

In the first place, there was the thought about what could be done with such a thing. It wasn't as if Kyousuke would get independence by feeding him a mountain of parsleys. *But that guy, I wish he would show some greed willingly, do what he wants, eat what he wants, speak out as he likes*, she thought. In the first place, Akira couldn't change that part of him in the 17 years they were together, so it shouldn't be something that Rin could easily change.

“Enough already.... Even though it's fine to do what you want, eat what you want, speak out as you like...”

“Hi—Himemizu-san, what are you saying?”

“He? What?”

“What was that ... ah!”

Sakuma's face once again turned red and she looked down. Rin rewound her own words and she understood.[Notes]

“Saa-chan...”

“Ah, wrong ... th—that, umm...”

“Yeah, it's okay. Since you're a succubus...”

“U—uuu...”

In any case, the plan to investigate Kyousuke's favorite things seems to be reaching its limit. It maybe better to find a different approach.

In the first place, she couldn't help but doubted whether or not Utsurogi Kyousuke remaining hollow was really a bad thing. *That way of thinking, I wonder if we can acknowledged it as one of the many individuality.* Rin thought about it for a while, but eventually she settled on the notion that she didn't want to do so.

It's fine to be kind others.

It's fine to be softhearted.

But it's dangerous to completely depend on others for your sense of values and subjectivity.

"Himemizu, Sakuma, what's the matter with you two?"

""Uwaa~a, hiyaaaaaaaa!!""

To the sudden voice from behind, the two people reflexively jumped. The owner of that voice was Kyousuke himself.

Kyousuke picked up the paper on the table and looked at it.

"Such things, favorite food parsley, and boobs...?"

"Ahh, yeah. I was thinking I'd make a profile of Utsurogi-kun..."

"Putting aside parsley, but what was that about the other thing?"

"Iyaa..., don't you like them?"

When Rin asked, Sakuma quickly raised her face and looked at Kyousuke. The one-piece she was wearing right now wasn't the open chest type so she couldn't make an appeal. *Bad luck.* As one would expected, this attack from Rin also made Kyousuke flinch slightly.

"I don't hate it in particular but.... What, I, did I do something to be teased by you two like this...?"

"The one teasing Utsurogi-kun, isn't it Utsurogi-kun himself..."

"That talk again..."

Kyousuke dejectedly hung his head.

"I have heard that quite often these day. Akai also said something like I better solve my problems properly..."

“Asuka-chan did?”

Sakuma raised a surprised voice and asked Kyousuke. Rin also heard this for the first time.

“Ah, no.... Akai said to keep that a secret. Sorry.”

“Is—is that so...”

Saying so, Sakuma put a hand on her shapely chin and made a troubled face. She strongly bit her beautiful peach-color lips. *Even without worrying about that, I don't think Akai will put her hands on Kyousuke.* For now, Rin's rivals were only Akira and Sakuma.

“That reminds me, Sakuma, Ryuzaki was calling. It seems to be a little consultation about future objectives.”

“Ah, yeah. All right. What is it?”

“Isn't it about searching for Goubayashi and Kaoruko, as well as exploring our surroundings. Let's stop the ship again and look around, like that.”

“Fun fun.... Thank you. I will go now.”

Sakuma smiled sweetly and stood up, heading for the exit of the dining room.

“Himemizu too, thank you. See you.”

“Yeah. Saa-chan, see you—.”

Sakuma smiled sweetly and stood up, heading for the exit of the dining room.

“Himemizu too, thank you. See you.”

“Yeah. Saa-chan, see you—.”

Bunbun, waving her hands, Rin saw off Sakuma. She seemed busy after all. Even so, she still managed to find some spare time to seriously discuss about Kyousuke in this way so Rin was very grateful.

“Goubayashi-kun, I wonder if we can find him...”

“Who knows.... But, even if it takes some time, we have to look for him.”

Rin got caught up in those words a little and looked up at Kyousuke. Recently, she felt that she was getting very sensitive toward his speech and conduct somehow. Whether they were words coming from his true feelings, or words to match with someone else, she could no longer distinguish.

“Utsurogi-kun, don’t you have something you want to do?”

“Ahh, recently, when I heard Himemizu talked about desire, I also thought about it.”

Kyousuke took a seat next to Rin and said. *He gave it some thought*, and Rin felt a little happy.

“What I want to do the most right now is to meet Goubayashi and Kogane as soon as possible.”

“Just meeting? Supposing you will meet soon and talk to each other, but then you are told that they don’t want to go together anymore, what would you do?”

He recalled the persuasion of Hanazono and Kaminari the other day. It was certainly important to be considerate toward his friends, but there was also the case of selfishly pushing through if it was for their sake after all. Since Kyousuke had a tendency to easily give way to others even if he himself had something he wanted to do, he had been worrying about that.

Kyousuke scratched his head with his mouth open. He might be making a bitter smile.

“About that, I’m stumped.”

He answered so to Rin question.

“I think I’m quite lost. What should I do in that situation? Should I still bid farewell with a smile?”

“From me, I cannot say anything, but 『*What **should** I do?*』 and 『*What’s the **best thing** to do?*』 are not things that you yourself *want* to do.”

Here, if Rin was to say 『*Be selfish Utsurogi-kun!*』, Kyousuke would do so. But that wasn’t because Kyousuke himself wanted to do so, but because Rin said she wanted him to. So then, Kyousuke didn’t change anything after all.

“In that case, I may persist a little after all.”

“What if other children oppose to taking Kogane-kun back?”

“Well...”

Kyousuke started brooding with his hand on his chin.

This is, just a little, isn't it? Substance. Rin looked at Kyouzuke who seemed to be seriously troubled and patted her chest a little (there wasn't any even when she was a human). *Kyouzuke isn't complete empty.*

“Does Himemizu hate taking Kogane back?”

“Nn? Me? Sure. Well, although he does make me feel uncomfortable, I would say that it's because I don't know much about Kogane-kun.”

When they were humans, she did greet him a few times in the class and exchanged a few words. Their relationship was only to that extent. So putting it in a good way, she didn't hate him, and putting it in a bad way, she had no interest in him. *What exactly is Kogane's true character?* She could only guess based on the fragmented information from Kyouzuke and Akira after all.

“Ryuzaki has said it well though, if all members of the class could return together, then it's better that way.”

“Well, you're right about that.”

Rin found some vestiges of individuality inside Kyouzuke so she became cheerful. *Although it's something originated from his naivety, if his feeling is strong enough to bend Kogane's will and the others' oppositions, then it was a big step forward. Something like this sprout of self-consciousness, I must take care of it seriously.*

“Well, there are students who hate him. Like Itomi-chan and Saa-chan. Beside them, other girls also quite dislike Kogane-kun.”

“What about Himemizu?”

“I don't hate him. Any human will give such thoughtless words sometime. But I wonder if he will apologize properly. Whether I can come to like him as a friend or not is a talk for later.”

While choosing her words carefully, Rin said so in order to not change Kyouzuke's intention in any way.

Kyouzuke muttered 『*As expected, it's like that*』.

“Eh?”

“I just thought that he must apologize as well. Kogane hasn't apologize to anyone. I recall that when Washio and the others apologized to me the other day.”

“Ah yeah. But, Washio-kun and the others’ apology didn’t come from their hearts, did it?”

For the present, they apologized in order to settle their past wrongdoing and escape from the pangs of conscience.

But well, the apology Rin wanted from Kogane was also just that degree, she thought that nearly half of the words 『*I’m sorry*』 which was said in society was such a thing. Those were probably not 『*I’m sorry*』 that came out because they felt ashamed of themselves and regretted their own actions from the bottom of their heart.

“Akira also got angry afterward. If I forgive that kind of thing, they will get carry away.”

“But Utsurogi-kun forgave them.”

“Rather than forgive, it’s because I don’t really care about it...”

Even though his body was scattered, Rin thought. Since she didn’t quite understand how serious a wound that was to a skeleton’s body, she couldn’t tsukkomi.

If his 『*I don’t really care*』 meant 『*Since there are a lot of things more fun than that, I can’t be bothered by every single little thing*』, Rin would be relieved, but as far as she could see, that was unlikely to be the case.

“Now now, Utsurogi-kun.”

Rin shook off her thoughts, and decided to focus on one thing.

“Let’s just think about bringing back Goubayashi-kun and Kaoruko-chan as well as Kogane-kun. That’s what Utsurogi-kun wants, isn’t it?”

“That’s right. Although it maybe none of my business, but I want Kogane to apologize properly.”

Regardless of whether or not he could be forgiven or not, so said Kyouusuke. For now, Kyouusuke had made a proper objective. The problem was that Akira and Sakuma would not receive this very pleasantly. Probably, the reason why Kyouusuke hadn’t brought this thought up ever since Kogane was kidnapped, seemed to be out of consideration for those two.

Rin was the only one who could support this. She felt that she needed to be firm.

Just then, the ship broadcast system rang. At the same time, the «*branch school*» stopped and Rin's body almost flew because of inertia.

『*Ah, everyone, please gather on the deck for a moment*』

Ryuzaki's voice was heard from the speakers.

『*We found something that seemed like a settlement which was destroyed long ago. I'd like to explore the surroundings of this place.*』

When all the classmates had gathered on the deck, they certainly could confirmed some buildings halfway up the mountains. Although the «*branch school*» had been slowly advancing through the valley, when it came to going up the mountainside, it would be hindered by the densely grown conifers. Ryuzaki's opinion was that he wanted to search around this area once, and it would also double as a survey of the surroundings.

According to the large amount of memo Selena left behind (she was still alive though), this area had wolf type monsters «*Forest Wolf*», mist type monsters «*Misty Fogg*» and fairy type monsters with the appearance of an old woman «*Black Anise*», or so it seemed. 『*Seem*』, because this area had remained unexplored for several hundreds years, so they had no choice but to analogize from considerably old data.

At any rate, the heavy cruiser branch school was anchored here, leaving a reasonable amount of people in the warship, including the liaison, several search teams were organized.

Starting from Akira who was staying in bed because of seasickness, the exploration teams were reorganized in order to prepare for the time when monsters attacked the heavy cruiser branch school. Hiding their identity during the time at the base, «*Team · Useless*», Kyouzuke group also joined the exploration teams in earnest.

Meanwhile, students who had difficulties moving in the mountains such as Uozumi Masuyo were on standby at the branch school.

Also, because they were going to advance in the conifer forest with poor visibility, each team was assigned one student with flying ability in order to quickly check the surrounding situation.

“That means, Nekomiya Miya is the leader of team 4. You're to follow behind

everyone. Since you can use both attack and recovery magic, you're basically a rearguard."

When she got down from the gangway, the caith sith of the drama club especially gave a greeting while proudly tracing her whiskers. Kyouzuke and Rin were put in the same team as Nekomiya. The other members were the flight unit Washio and Kinogasa. There were a total of 5 people, but Kyouzuke and Rin were being treated as one person. The reason being was that they participated in the combined state, so it actually became 4 people. Everyone could already grasp almost all of each other's abilities, but just in case, they explained to each other again.

"I'm Washio the Gryphon. Let's see, basically, I fight in close quarters combat using nails and beak. And then there's also the technique to attack by hurling my feathers."

"«*Howling Feather*» is it? You were practicing it with that name, weren't you?"

"...Where did you hear that?"

His taste was quite similar to Akira. There was a surprising side to him as well.

"Matango, umm, is a mushroom monster. I'm Kinogasa. I'm also a CQC type. But my attack power isn't that high. I mainly support by scattering spores."

"When performing the spore attack, Washio should flap his wings and send them flying. Because it would be disastrous if we were to breath them in."

Kyouzuke and Rin also gave their greeting. They were a little embarrassed to explain themselves that 『*We combine*』 again, but since everyone already knew about it, they just spilled it without hesitation.

"For the time being, the two of you will be the corner of this party's front line. Is that fine?"

"Ho—i."

"Understood."

Kinogasa carried the knapsack prepared for the search and then all of them decided to depart.

They heard that fog monsters appeared here, but this mountain range was already covered in fog to begin with. And with the existence of the densely grown conifer forest, the mountain slope where they were walking was indeed

eerie. For the past few days, the weather also wasn't very good because of the presence of the dark clouds covering the sky.

In addition, no human had set foot on this mountain for a long time, and there was hardly anything you could call roads. They could only barely go through the animal trail that they had no idea where it lead to. While Washio periodically flew up and checked their surroundings, they carefully headed to the site of the settlement.

"Say, in this case, it would have been much faster if we have the guys who can fly head there from the start..."

"There are no recovery personnel who can fly."

"Hmm? Ryuzaki, Washio, Kagoi, Kaminari, Harui.... Oh, it's true."

Nekomiya refuted Kinogasa's words, Kinogasa hit his palm in admiration. **Puff**, and the spores scattered, Washio hurriedly blew them off.

"Thank you, Washio. I'm saved."

"Nn, ah, ahh no..."

When Kyouzuke expressed his gratitude while walking, Washio awkwardly averted his eyes.

"(Washio-kun still looks somewhat awkward)"

Rin told Kyouzuke in a voice that only he could heard.

"(Even though we reconciled with much troubles)"

"(I guess his heart is filled with regret because of the halfhearted apology)"

They thought that they would encounter some kind of monster on the way, but no such things happened, and they easily reached the settlement ruins. There were lots of buildings made up of stone bricks lined up, but all of them were covered with moss, ivy, and their shape had been partially destroyed by the overgrown trees.

"What should we do for the survey?"

"Class rep probably wants to search for Goubayashi and Kaoruko. However, I don't expect to find them in these parts. Even if we enter the site where people used to live, this is already a historic ruin."

When he found some settlement ruins scattered here and there on the

mountains, Ryuzaki seemed to have thought that Goubayashi group might have been drawn to those place. Other than that, there was naturally also the implications of finding any tools which seemed usable, or supplementing the edible protein source.

Still, as far as the original purpose was concerned, it seemed almost completely futile.

Nekomiya while stroking her whiskers, looked around the ruined site.

“For now, Washio flies up and sends a signal to the heavy cruiser branch school. Kinogasa watches out for Washio.”

“Yes.”

“Ou.”

“Utsurogi and Himemizu try to explore the site a little more. Of course, don’t stray too far from Washio group.”

“Understood.”

“Oui oui.”

As instructed by her, Washio spread his wings and slowly flew up toward the dark clouds. Nekomiya sent an eye signal to Kyouusuke and Rin, then like that, they advanced deeper into the ruins. Looking at the scene where roads paved with bricks were crumbling, and many trees grew everywhere, they couldn’t help but feel the power of nature.

“Look like it’s going to rain.... I hope Kaminari is going to be okay.”

While looking at the sky, Nekomiya muttered a little.

“Ah~, Totoha-chan is no good with thunders.”

“If thunder started rumbling, I feel that she won’t be able to fly in the meanwhile. That girl...”

Certainly, it would be too lame for a flight unit who should be sending signals, to not be able to fly.

“If I’m not mistaken, Kaminari had been put to the defense of the branch school. There’s no oversight from Ryuzaki in that part.”

“Nn, is that so. As expected of class rep.”

They didn’t intend to go far from Washio and the others’ place. They planned to lightly look around the surroundings and return, but then Kyouusuke group

found a structure which was in an almost perfect condition, it wasn't covered in ivies or pierced by trees.

Stained glass was embedded in a somewhat vertically long building. On the roof is a statue of a man wearing a robe.

It appeared to be a church. Naturally, there was no cross since it wasn't Christianity.

In the village that was so messed up, only that church was intact.

"...You two, do you think that God exists?"

Nekomiya asked in a melodramatic tone.

Certainly, it was too good to be true for only the church to not receive any damage. However, since this world was a fantasy world, they felt that it wouldn't be too surprising even if God's divine protection did exist.

Nekomiya, Kyousuke as well as Rin. Without anyone suggesting it, they all naturally turned their steps toward the church. When they tried to put their hands on the gate, it didn't seem rusty in particular and opened pretty easily.

"Oohh..."

Voice of admiration leaked out of Kyousuke's mouth.

"This, by any chances, there could be people here."

"I know. I wonder if a hermit or something lives here."

Nekomiya also nodded, and the three people set foot in the church. And then, they stiffened.

Standing there were a man and a woman. The woman was wearing a plain dark blue habit covering her body's lines which could be understood as sensual with a glance. *A so-called nun. She's a sister.* This was still all right. They felt that she was a little too tidy to have been living in this place and her clothes were much too similar to the nuns' of Kyousuke and the others' world, but it was natural that there was a sister in the church.

The problem was the man.

"Huh?"

That guy who turned his eyes toward Kyousuke and the others with a

somewhat wild smile plastered on his face, seemed to be a boy around the same age as them.

Before the boy dressed in an unexpected get-up, Kyousuke and the others completely stopped in their track. Looking at them, the boy in question said.

“What’s this, when I came looking for the reincarnated ogre.... Some unexpected bunch have stopped by.”

The clothes the man was wearing was a student uniform with stand-up collar. Furthermore, he was wearing an arm band which had words that was clearly Japanese.

“I’m Suou the Knight. This here is Akeno the Bishop. Welcome, Municipal Jindai High-school 2nd year class 4.”

Chapter 34: Long Goodbye

Suou the Knight. As well as Akeno the Bishop. The two in front of them introduced themselves as such.

The «*Red Winged Devil*» whom they met before was a «*Pawn*», and then, from their manner of speaking, these guys here seemed to know about the circumstances to some extent, a connection was easily made. These two were colleagues of that guy. And if their strength was in accordance with the chess pieces, then they had to be several times stronger than that Pawn.

“(Himemizu, how’s our water storage?)”

“(There’s none.... Because we kept it light when we explore...)”

Since they had to be in the combined state for a long time in the search, it wasn’t wise to combine with Rin in her compressed state. Although it was a reasonable judgement, now it had completely backfired on them. Nekomiya was also openly wary of the two before her, all her fur stood on end and her tail straightened.

The boy wearing a school uniform boy named Suou stopped smiling and tilted his head curiously.

“What, are you nervous?”

No hostility could be felt from that attitude. Even though the woman in sister clothing Bishop Akeno folded her arms and sent a look full of suspicion, Knight Suou could even be said to be very friendly.

“Well, there are various things I want to ask, but let’s me say this first. We are not your enemies. Because the bunch of Pawns’ communication was lacking, an unfortunate accident has occurred.”

“We cannot trust you.”

Nekomiya said so with a tense voice.

“I don’t care what your intention is, but you have attacked our base, kidnapped one of our classmates. Even if you say you want to make peace now, we won’t accept it.”

“Like I said, that was just an unfortunate accident. And well, I wonder if you will believe me, but you guys came here in those appearances by chance.”

Suou thrust his hands into his pants’ pockets. Kyouzuke took a glance at his armband. It wasn’t as if he could read everything, but he could barely discern the part written as 『*Kougyou High-school*』. *It’s Japanese after all. Also, that is a high-school armband.*

Suou and Akeno also sounded like Japanese names somehow.

In that case, could it be that Akeno’s sister clothing also wasn’t something from this world. There was plenty of possibility that those two were trippers, but at least, the atmosphere they were giving out weren’t that of human’s.

“It’s no coincidence, isn’t there that possibility?”

Nekomiya was speaking accompanied by dramatic gestures as ever, and her words were as calm as usual.

They were earning time. If Kyouzuke group didn’t come back soon, Washio and Kinogasa should definitely become suspicious. At such time, it was decided beforehand that they would signal the heavy cruiser branch school and inform Ryuzaki about the abnormal situation.

“I want to ask one more thing. How the heck did you guys know about our situation? And where are you guys from?”

“That’s not one question but two that you want to know, isn’t it?”

“Isn’t it fine if you allow that much? It’s not fair for you to one-sidedly say to become your friends while only you guys understand the situation.”

Not only her words were smooth, her ad lib was put to effective use as well. Even though Nekomiya combat ability wasn’t very high, that quick wittedness made her very dependable. It wasn’t just for show that she was made a team leader.

Putting a hand on his chin, Knight Suou let out a voice 『*Fumu*』. Although he was boy with a rough attitude and appearance, because of his natural handsome features, he came to be considerably good-looking.

“The possibility that it’s no coincidence? As for me, I would like to quickly tell you as much as possible, but...”

“It’s pointless, Suou.”

Akeno in sister clothing, who had been crossing her arms until then, snorted.

“Even if you tell them the circumstances, they won’t be satisfied. They’re just buying time. Reinforcements will come soon.”

“What, is that so?”

Since Akeno had seen through her action, Nekomiya clicked her tongue. *They noticed.*

“Either way, her betrayal is definite. We need to report to the King.”

“Looks like it. It’s unfortunate though.” [Notes]

Her? Betrayal? The heck are they talking about? Kyousuke was desperately trying to understand it, but the two before him didn’t seem like they would give him the time to. Suou the Knight made his move first. He thrust his hand in his pocket and starting approaching in long strides. His pace was obviously different from before.

Determinedly walking on the red carpet of the church, that appearance was the very definition of yankee itself. Then he stopped just a few steps away from Kyousuke group, leant forward, glared at them and said.

“Let me introduce myself once again. I, am Suou. Suou the Knight. I’m going to capture you now.”

His words suddenly changed to be belligerent. It was completely a declaration of war.

“I will incapacitate you if you don’t comply. While I have no intent to kill you, that doesn’t apply if you resist.”

“Run! Utsurogi, Himemizu!”

At the same timing as Nekomiya shouted, Kyousuke group ran toward the exit of the church. Their only thought was to run away. Since it had come to this, they had no choice but to escape. What would happen if they were caught? More than just having no answers, they would have no choice but to be obedient.

Putting their hands on the closed heavy doors of the church, they opened it. However, the moment they tried to rush out, they heard voice coming from ahead of them.

“I was late in saying this,”

Nekomiya with her four feet on the floor, swallowed her breath.

“By «*resist*», I mean that escape is also part of it. It’s my bad to say it so late.”

Unnoticed, Knight Suou stood before them, and then with his hands still in his pockets, he unleashed a violent kick. It was a so-called yakuza kick. The kick landed on Kyouusuke’s chest, and with an exploding impact, his body was easily blown away.

“Guo...!”

“Kyaa...!”

The scream of Kyouusuke and Rin echoed, the body of those two drew a parabola and flew back inside the church.

“Utsurogi! Himemizu!”

Nekomiya cried out. Kyouusuke raised his body.

“Nekomiya, go now!”

“But...!”

“It’s possible with your «*Shadow Passage*»! Hurry!”

“.....!”

Nekomiya nodded, then she slipped through Suou’s arm trying to catch her and jumped into the shadow.

It was one of the racial abilities of cait sith that Selena spoke of. To cross over from shadow to shadow. The clearer the shadow, the farther she could move. So in this bad weather, it took all of her efforts just to escape from this predicament. *Still, I should escape. I have to join up with Washio group and inform Ryuzaki about this.*

“From what I can see, the cait sith has yet to reach Phase 2.”

While putting his hands in his pockets, Suou muttered.

“I see. Is it better if we just take those two and go back?”

“Yea. Having «*Characteristics Amplification*» in Phase 2 is pretty rare. It seems that the Pawn didn’t know about it.”

Knight in front, Bishop in back. They had been completely sandwiched from

two side inside the church.

Kyousuke didn't have any intention to give up yet. It wasn't just him alone here. At least, he wanted Rin to escape to safety. It could be seen that Rin strongly stuck to Kyousuke's entire body. But rather than her feeling nervous, it seemed more likely to be an expression of protest against Kyousuke's idea.

"I'm staying, there's no such thing as me escaping alone."

"Right, even I have no intention of wasting myself after all..."

"Geez..."

While exchanging a few words, they ascertained Suou and Akeno's movements.

Suou was walking like a yankee as usual, Akeno walked briskly with her back straightened, and they shortened the distance between them. Looking at Akeno, it seemed that black lightning energy was running through both of her arms. It was the same technique that the Pawn used. Its power was unlikely to be on the same level though. Even in the unlikely case that it was weaker, Rin not in the high-pressured state wouldn't be able to endure that attack.

Kyousuke clenched his fist. And then Rin further hardened the tip of the clenched fist.

"UOORYAAAAA!"

Turning around, they threw their fist at Suou with all their might. However, Knight Suou didn't show any sign of avoiding it and instead took that punch with his face.

"Huh...!"

Not only did he not avoid it, Suou didn't even defend, Kyousuke inadvertently raised his voice.

"Ouou."

Under the struck fist, Suou laughed, exposing his fangs.

"It's light. After all, even if it's also called Phase 2, this is how slime and skeleton are."

"Shi—shit...!"

Kyousuke clenched his fist again and repeatedly hit Suou, Suou remained as he was with his hands in his pockets and didn't move even a bit. It had much less effect compared to the Pawns who wore the robust armors. Even if they weren't in the compressed state, the opponent was defenseless. And yet, it was like this.

“Oraaa!”

“Guaa...!”

Still had his hands in his pocket, Suou gave a yakuza kick again. Kyousuke's body was lightly blown away.

Suou squatted in front of Kyousuke's collapsed body and looked at him.

“You're the Skeleton, Utsurogi? I heard from Kogane.”

“Kogane...!?”

Trying to control his body, Kyousuke stood up.

“Kogane-kun is still safe!?”

Rin also raised her voice. Immediately after that, Akeno, who had accumulated energy in both arms, released the lightning to immobilize Kyousuke and Rin's body. Burning pain ran through his body and Kyousuke once again dropped to his knees.

“Guaaa!”

“Kyaaa!”

“Ahh, oi Akeno. Don't disturb me when I'm talking here.”

“Mu...”

A little displeased, Bishop Akeno withdrew her hands.

“Kogane is safe. Since he has become my buddy now.”

“Bud—buddy...? Friend...?”

“Ahh. He wants to apologize to you.”

He didn't quite understand what Suou was saying, but only the last part was clear. Kogane said he wanted to apologize. In that case, all the more so, they couldn't afford to stop here. Forcing strength into his body, Kyousuke stood up again. His body was a little more heavy than before. It directly showed just how tired and damaged Rin was.

“(Himemizu, are you okay...?)”

“(A, a little ... painful...)”

Rin’s consciousness was faint. At this rate, it wouldn’t be strange if she fainted soon.

“You guys are also Kogane’s friends right? So well, such actions would make him sad. Yeah?”

I wonder how serious Suou’s words really is.

Suou and Kogane are friends? Is that even true in the first place? Kyouzuke glared at Suou while trying to control Rin’s body that felt like it would melt any time now.

“Th—that proposal, I cannot comply...”

“Hou, why?”

“Because it’s unbelievable.... In addition, I must not leave the branch school now. There is also Himemizu, and I am needed by everyone. Since we have to go home with all of us, I’m going to take back Kogane.”

“Houhou indeed.”

Suou crossed his arms and nodded **un un**.

“It’s light as expected.”

“What...”

“Your words are light. I guess you just put together suitable words that comes to mind. Well, you have reincarnated as a skeleton after all, so I thought it may be like that. Rather than what you yourself want to do, you just speak of such superficial things.”

Even so, Kyouzuke couldn’t understand what the man before him had said. At that time, Rin, while doing her best just to maintain a mushy shape, barely raised her voice.

“U—Utsurogi-kun is ... to Kogane-kun...”

“Himemizu, don’t push yourself!”

“Kogane-kun ... he wants to bring back. Since that is, the truth...”

It seemed that Rin had become desperate somehow. He wondered what she was trying to cover for so much like that. It was as if she was trying to protect a

dandelion found on the roadside from being trampled on. However, Suou snorted at her words.

“You think so? Isn’t he just under that impression because someone else told him so? Does he really want to take Kogane home? If he just want to stay together with his friends, then isn’t it also fine to come over here?”

“That, that is...”

“You think so? Isn’t he just under that impression because someone else told him so? Does he really want to take Kogane home? If he just want to stay together with his friends, then isn’t it also fine to come over here?”

“That, that is...”

Kyousuke thrust his hand at the area around his heart, there was this disturbing sensation. *It’s true. If I think about it, there’s no need to stubbornly stick to the branch school. Then why did I think about taking Kogane himself back home? Why I didn’t try to find other means?*

The difference between means and purpose, Kyousuke couldn’t understand. Kyousuke held his head. *What the heck I want to do?*

What I want to do. What I wish for.

I want to help someone. I want to support someone. I want someone to say 『Thank you』 (to me).

There was such a faint memory. No, it wasn’t a memory. It was an emotion imprinted deep within his heart.

Kyousuke held his head. No matter how much he fumbled around for the origin of that emotion, no answer could be found. He unhesitatingly made promises to everyone’s words without careful thoughts, nodded, forgave, gave priority, all that to receive 『Thank you』 as compensation. His inside was empty. It was because his purpose was only to be appreciated, to make other people feel pleasant.

“As a guy who has gone through the Transference Denaturation Gate and become skeleton, well, it will be like that. No body, no flesh, no organs.”

“Stop!”

Rin raised an especially loud voice.

“Stop, stop it! Do not bully Utsurogi-kun! Just, just recently, finally...”

“Even if you find what you want to do and solve it, it wouldn’t change a single thing. Hey, Utsurogi. Do you know what I want to say?”

Suou stood up with his hands still thrust in his pockets. Unnoticed, the beastly expression plastered on his face had disappeared, and replacing that was just a chilling glare.

“You are empty. Just like that skull of yours.”

Empty. When hearing those words, Kyousuke somehow felt as if his very own existence was fading away.

To protect himself, he had been averting his eyes from what was within himself and forgot about it, but once he became aware of it, everything just flooded out all at once. Now that it had come to this, whether or not he truly wanted to bring Kogane back, he didn’t know. He didn’t even know if his feeling of friendship toward Kogane was genuine.

By any chance, could it be that I only tried to help Kogane because I wanted to be appreciated.

It’s not just Kogane. Ryuzaki, Sakuma and Selena too. And then, I have also easily accepted Washio group’s apologies.

About Akira.

And about Rin as well.

I actually don’t think anything of them at all, I, myself,

“Wrong!”

Rin cried out in a desperate voice.

“Wrong, that’s wrong! Utsurogi-kun is not such a person! Utsurogi-kun’s inside, that’s just how he is, I don’t think! Because...” [Notes]

“Well, that’s not something an outsider can tell. Himemizu-san.”

Said Suou while scratching his head **bori bori**.

“Besides, *that’s just how he is*, is such a terrible way of putting it. If this guy is empty, then that’s the same as cutting down even the little bit of «*desire*» left clinging at the bottom of that emptiness. If you accept that, it is because he himself isn’t loved.”

“U, guu...”

“Don’t feel bad. This guy’s illness is rather serious, this is a necessary process to face himself. Well, I’ll take care of it properly until the end. Hey, Akeno.”

Perhaps she had been completely bored to death until then. Bishop Akeno, who didn’t join in the conversation, only said 『*All right*』 while crossing her arms. Or rather, she didn’t seem interested in this topic regarding Kyouzuke’s inside in the first place.

“So, Suou. Is it fine to capture them now?”

“Ou. I’m counting on you.”

Akeno again gathered black energy in both hands. With Kyouzuke still being dumfounded, Bishop Akeno slowly approached him.

Just at that moment.

“Utsuroggiiiiiii!!”

Breaking the stained glass, a flying object flew inside the church. It was a surprising silhouette. Its form was like a combination of an eagle and a lion, and it fired spinning feathers like arrows at Akeno, interrupting her gathering of energy. Kyouzuke who had lost sight of himself until then was also involuntarily taken aback.

“Wa—Washio...!?”

“Uooo! Howling Featheerrsss—!!”

The fired feathers didn’t pierced through Suou and Akeno, failing to deal even a tiny bit of damage. But it was enough as distraction.

Attendance number 40. Washio Kouta the Gryphon, like a bird of prey, grabbed hold of Kyouzuke’s arms with his forelegs, and immediately flew out from the broken window at great speed. Rin who had become mushy desperately clung on so as not to melt down.

“That’s why I told you, Suou.”

Looking at them flew off, Akeno criticized Suou in a loud voice.

“There is a possibility that reinforcement will come soon. Really, they managed to escape after all.”

“Ah—, sorry. But didn’t you forget what you said yourself?”

“.....”

In response to Suou's words, Akeno bit her lips and said no more. *Look like it's true.*

Still with his hands in his pockets, Suou grew red wings in his back.

“Well, I don't plan to let them escape. Still, I'm going to call Kogane for now. We also need to find the reincarnated ogre who should be loitering around somewhere as well.”

“Fumu. Then let's pursue.”

Akeno spread out the same wings as Suou, then two devils separately flew away from the church.

“That was close. I'm glad I made it on time.”

Putting Kyouusuke on his back properly, Washio said. Since her worry of being thrown off was gone for now, Rin took a breath.

Before this, after receiving the report from Nekomiya, Washio sent a signal to the branch school, informing them of the state of emergency, then he immediately flew straight toward the church where Kyouusuke and Rin were. It wasn't known but a gryphon's flying speed is immense. Thanks to that, they managed to escape, although only temporarily.

However, while riding on Washio's back, Kyouusuke just hung his head and didn't say anything.

“What's the matter, Utsurogi. You don't seem energetic.”

“Ahh, yeah. Washio-kun, it's just...”

Instead of Utsurogi who didn't answer, Rin said.

At that time, Kyouusuke's feeling had been directly transmitted to Rin. It was a side effect of the combination.

For this reason, Kyouusuke's emotions when he was in the process of fumbling deep inside himself and trying to salvage unthinkable things, had also been transmitted to Rin. Extremely egoistic, and yet distorted, the blank in Utsurogi Kyouusuke's desire. Just wanting to be thanked by someone, empty with no contents, the hollowness of his desire.

If that was true, then it wasn't just he himself that Kyouusuke thought nothing of

and was indifferent to. He also didn't even care about others. Because he turned his eyes away from the true nature of others, he couldn't see what was within himself as well. Rin too, had received a considerable shock from this.

Anyone would have the desire to be appreciated. But for that reason, he did things such as treating his own life lightly, didn't care for the essential feelings of others and not to mention putting away the compatibility between two people. That, was too distorted.

“Washio...”

Since Utsurogi started saying hesitantly, Rin also listened attentively.

“Wh—what is it?”

“Why did you save me...”

“Eh?”

“That was dangerous after all.... You could have died.”

“Ah—...”

Touching that topic, Washio was extremely embarrassed and started looking off into the distance.

“Well, I, since I didn't apologize properly...”

“Ha...?”

When thinking about what he was going to say, such words came out.

“I was at fault, I truly thought so.... Or perhaps I didn't. I don't really know.”
“.....”

“But then thinking about it carefully, I don't dislike you or anything. So probably, it was because I was irritated. Sorry.”

Inside Rin's heart, expectation and dark feelings both welled up at the same time.

Would Washio's words enrich Kyouzuke's heart? This timing was very bad. But by any chance, for Kyouzuke who had been shaken up by Suou's words and were then depressed from the received shock, those words might perhaps become his salvation. It was a heartfelt apology from Washio Kouta.

“Washio...”

“An?”

“Thank you...”

“What, stop it. What do you want to say thank for...”

Right after that, some black energy flew from behind and hit Washio.

“Uwaa!?”

Washio screamed and lost his balance in the air. Kyousuke and Rin were struck with the after-effect of the impact. En route toward the heavy cruiser branch school above the forest, Washio’s body fell while spinning. Kyousuke and Rin were thrown off into the air.

Breaking the conifer trees’ branches, slamming against the tree trunks, the three people’s bodies rolled on the mountain slope. For a moment, they didn’t know what had happened. But then their understanding quickly caught up. It was the Knight or the Bishop from before. Either one of them had to have chased after Washio.

Kyousuke quickly raised his body, and then Rin followed after. Washio had collapsed in a place a bit away.

Considering that they had fallen from a high altitude, he could have bruises, broken bones or such things, living type monsters would take bigger damage after all. In fact, Washio was bleeding from his entire body and couldn’t move.

“Washio-kun, are you okay!?”

“Somehow, I’m still alive...”

“That’s good...”

Rin breathed out in relieve. Slightly after her, Kyousuke also rushed over.

“Washio...”

“No, bad.... I failed.... This, was I hit...”

Washio slowly stood up, but his legs were still unsteady.

“Your flying speed was quite fast. But not quite enough. If you have awakened to Phase 2, you may be able to escape though.”

That talk again? Although Rin trembled a little from the voice coming from behind, but anger and irritation came out first and foremost. Standing there was Bishop Akeno, from the back of her tidy sister clothing grew malicious red wings. That figure spoke eloquently that her true nature wasn’t a

saint but a devil. In both of her hands, crackling black energy overflowed.

“But it’s over. I will capture you. It’s fine to be proud, as you will be the elites of our army.”

“Shi–shit...!”

Washio fired his feathers and attacked Akeno. But she just brushed them off as if it was just troublesome.

“Run, Utsurogi-kun! Combine!”

“Ah, ah, ahh...”

While replying to Rin’s words hesitantly, Kyouzuke accepted it. Rin wrapped around Kyouzuke’s body, but for some reason, her whole body got an incongruous impression compared to up till now. The combination wasn’t done properly. Kyouzuke’s body felt distant.

“Oi, you two, get down!”

Washio shouted and pushed away Kyouzuke who had just finished combining. Immediately after they took cover, black energy spears penetrated the surrounding ground. She didn’t plan to simply catch them. She planned to torment them until their will to escape completely evaporated.

We have to escape. Escape, is it possible? If we don’t escape.

“You two, sorry.”

Washio muttered such a thing.

“Geez! Washio-kun, why are you apologizing now of all time...”

“I, it maybe already hopeless for me.”

“What are...”

What are you saying, Rin stopped speaking in the middle of her words involuntarily. In the body of Washio, who pushed Kyouzuke and Rin away, stuck 2, 3 black spears from just now. Bright red blood was constantly flowing out.

“Qui–quickly, run.... For what reason do you think I covered for you...”

Said Washio while Akeno was approaching with an indifferent expression.

“But, Washio ... you are...”

“Say, Utsurogi, at times like this, won’t you let me act cool for a bit.”

The black spears Akeno released once again pierced into Washio's body. Even if she did say to add them as war potentials, perhaps Washio who had yet to reach Phase 2, had a low priority. Or did she plan to capture them after weakening them to the limit. Or maybe Washio simply took the spears that were aimed at Kyousuke?

"Utsurogi-kun!"

Rin shouted. However, as if he had been petrified, Utsurogi's body wouldn't move.

Washio clicked his tongue, then as it was, he turned back and leaped at Akeno.

"Mu...!"

Was that action unexpected indeed, still, while Akeno's reaction was a little delayed, she cladded her fist in black energy and counter-attacked against Washio. Her fist penetrated his chest.

"Gofu..."

Blood leaked out of Washio's beak.

"Washio...!"

"Sa-say, Utsurogi.... I'm not particularly serious. Since I'm jittery, I don't have the confidence that I won't bully the weak..."

"What are you saying!"

Kyousuke shouted. A heartbreaking voice squeezed out from his empty bottom. That, however, was much more heavy and strong than any other words that Kyousuke had ever said until now.

"Don't worry about such things! Didn't I say I forgive you! Didn't I say I don't care about it!"

"Utsurogi-kuunn!"

Rin turned Kyousuke around with brute force. Since Kyousuke's body still didn't move, Rin took the initiative. With outside force, Utsurogi Kyousuke's body was raised. There was a strong resistance, but Rin held it down.

Washio had suffered fatal injuries, but where could his strength have come from? He was clinging, biting and digging with his claws and beaks, refusing to let go of Akeno who was grappling with him, trying to pull him off. The irritated

Akeno released many black spears, turning Washio's body into a hedgehog.

"Let go, Himemizu! Let me go!"

"I won't let go!!"

As if rolling, they ran down the mountain slope.

"That's why! I also understand Kogane's feelings! Tell him when you met him! At that time when he tried to sell us out, I already don't mind it..."

"Washiooo!"

As if to drown out Washio's voice as he shouted out his last words, the sounds of flesh and bones being torn off echoed throughout the mountain forest covered in dense fog.

"Phase 2 at the last moment? This is a little regrettable."

Bishop Akeno kicked the Gryphon's corpse rolling on the slope and clicked her tongue. A powerful neurotoxin was secreted from feathers stabbed throughout her body. With this, she couldn't chase after the skeleton that had run away. There was something ghastly in that last attack. She didn't expect to go as far as killing him, but she took an attack with poison that could deprive her body of its functions. As one would expected, she couldn't afford to soften the black energy in order to capture him. *Well, among the abilities that gryphon can develop in Phase 2, the secretion of neurotoxin isn't that strong. Let's give it up.*

Be that as it may, I can use this poison.

For now, once my body is healed, I'll drag the gryphon corpse and return to the old castle. In the end, there wasn't a turn for the magical beast that has just finished its adjustment, but then I can add a new ability to it. Next, those guys are most probably gathering in one place and moving together. I will leave their pursuit to Suou.

I should better contact him at least though.

Akeno took out a mobile phone from her sister clothing and breathed a sigh.

"But this sad sight of being attack by 1 *gryphon*. Even though there were the problem of compatibility and my carelessness, the title of Bishop is crying..."

With a little bitter thought, Akeno waited for the poison in her body to wear

off.

Chapter 35: Saying Goodbye Is to Die a Little

“Akeno!!”

As soon as he came back to the old castle, Suou approached Akeno. Akeno who was making adjustment to the magical beast raised her face and looked back.

“Suou? That was quick. What happened to that bunch?”

“They escaped. That bunch was onboard a land warship. May be there is a gremlin who has reached Phase 2.”

“Is that why you cautiously return?”

“No, I came back because I have a bad premonition.”

Right after saying that, Suou grabbed the collars of Akeno’s sister clothing.

“You, you killed that gryphon. What’s the meaning of this?”

Veins popped out on Suou’s forehead. His handsome face distorted into one of brutality, and his fangs were bared in intimidation.

The strength of Suou who was a Knight and Akeno who was a Bishop was almost equal. But in overall, Akeno was slightly stronger. A Knight cannot use black energy. Therefore, she could shake him off if she wanted to, she could try to fight back if she wanted to. But Akeno did not. She was puzzled.

“Mu, no. I messed up a little. I’m sorry for arbitrarily doing things, but even if you look at his Phase 2 ability, in the future...”

“Do not say that kind of things!”

It was normal for Suou to be exasperated and shouting.

But he had almost never truly showed anger to this degree. Akeno shrugged.

“It’s fine? Even though it was also my fault for not saying it strongly enough. Once you kill, the 『*negotiating*』 card cannot be used anymore! What do you think would happen if you go and meet the remaining bunch!? Since the Queen has betrayed us, we can no longer take the leisurely attitude. Be more serious!”

Against Suou’s menacing look, Akeno frantically nodded her head.

Clicking his tongue, Suou finally released his hands. Akeno straightened out the

wrinkle clothes at her chest.

“No, since I more or less did use an overbearing attitude against Utsurogi, I’m in no position to say such self-important things. My bad.”

“Y–yea...”

Suou roughly scratched his head. As he had said, the Queen’s betrayal was definite. However, from what he could see in the exchange at the church earlier, that bunch had yet to hear the circumstance around this time mass trip from the Queen. Suou might have planned on explaining the circumstances with Kogane’s mediation and establishing a mean for re-negotiation.

“Is—is it that bad...?”

“Considerable. Since it was Utsurogi, I was thinking that we could manage it somehow with Kogane standing in between even if we use a somewhat forceful method, but as one would expect, it is already hopeless once you kill one of them. Seriously! You! Even the time in the former world! Seriously...!”

The thing called human heart, Akeno completely didn’t understand. But only this time, she knew that Suou was seriously exposing his anger and irritation, so she became obedient.

“What should I tell Kogane...”

“I haven’t told him yet. Because there is the possibility of estrangement as expected?”

“You cannot tell him in the first place.”

Suou spat out his words. Seeing that his anger had yet to be abated, Akeno shrunk herself.

“Do not tell Kogane about the matter of the gryphon yet. It’s bad for him but we’ll hide it. I will decide how to move against that bunch after thinking about it some more.”

Forcibly carrying it out, or establishing a mean of negotiation somehow. When it came to that talk, there was no room for Akeno to intervene. In the case of forcibly capturing them, it was dangerous to get into their base. Until now, the betrayal of the Queen hadn’t been confirmed, so they sent the Pawns in to see the situation. But now, if they tried to take a forceful method in front of the Queen, it might very well develop in to a battle with the Queen

herself.

Queen and Rook are major pieces. If they were to display even half of the power in their possession, the King would sense it immediately. That seemed to be one of the reason why the traitorous Queen didn't lead the monster army to attack this place, but as expected, that wouldn't hold if they tried to attack them with force.

Let's have some of the Pawns remaining in the castle head to the King. The King will know of the Queen's betrayal soon. After that, we will deal with the matters regarding that bunch again, until then, we have no choice but to act according to the previous order.

"Let's have the Pawn monitor that bunch for now. In case of the possibility of them acting independently, we will surround those guys and bring them back. Good? As a general rule, no killing."

"I, I know."

"Really?"

The look in Suou's eyes wasn't very clear, he was still somewhat skeptical.

"So then, where is that bunch heading to now?"

"They're proceeding toward here straight through the valley. They'll come here in any case."

"However, they need to get out of the «Hydra Valley» before that."

Suou nodded to Akeno's words.

The Hydra Valley. Hundreds of years ago, the Demon King terrorizing this world released a giant multi-headed monster in order to destroy the nearby countries. Even now, it had settled in the valley, crawling around as if it owned the place. It wasn't something that could be subjugated with just a few Pawns, but since it was useful as a watchdog substitute, it was left as is.

"What will you do? As expected, everything would come to nothing if that bunch gets eaten by the hydra."

"I don't like to take this kind of hand too much, but well, let's leave them alone for a while. Nevertheless, I'm increasing the number Pawns for surveillance."

Suou scratched his head.

"Since they're upset that one of their friends has died, when seeing

something that enormous, they won't be able to stand out of fear. We're going to help when the foundation of that bunch's cooperation starts shaking, well, some of them will drift over to this side, perhaps."

"Which reminds me, we didn't find that reincarnated ogre in the end."

"Ah—, that's right. Seriously, it's a heap of troubles..."

Washio Kouta has died. When that fact was told to the students gathered on the deck, they froze up for an instant.

As soon as receiving Kyousuke and Rin who came back, the heavy cruiser branch school took off. It was because there was a possibility of being pursued if they were to stay there. They didn't neglect being careful of their surroundings, but they proceed forward into the valley at the maximum allowable speed of the ship.

On the deck, unrest gradually welled up and spread, then it became a commotion. In some way, they couldn't keep up with this reality, and what came to them first wasn't shock and grief but rather confusion.

"Is, is that ... true...?"

Kensaki Megumi the Dullahan timidly raised her hand and asked. Ryuzaki nodded.

"This is something I heard from Rin but it's true. That's why we took off without waiting for Washio's return. In the middle of escaping from the red winged devils who attacked Nekomiya group, he was chased, and killed."

Some students who were informed beforehand hung their heads, trembling. Finally, Washio's death began to spread as a real feeling among them.

"What, what kind of things...!"

Hakuba the Unicorn, who was always hanging out with Washio, squeezed out his voice.

"Why are you so calm.... How, why Washio..."

"The reason why Washio passed away is because of my decisions."

Ryuzaki looked around at everyone in the class and clearly said so.

"If I didn't say that all members of our class should leave the kingdom, if I

didn't say that we should stopped there and explore, Washio wouldn't have died. I admit it. However, I don't plan on stepping down from the leader position because of Washio's death like the time when the Wight King attacked the base."

Ryuzaki was looked at with various feelings from his classmates. Resentment, sorrow, grief, distrust and fear.

The feelings of roughly all 30 of his classmates, Ryuzaki took it head on.

He could get off here, he could also escape. However, Ryuzaki didn't have any intention to escape to a corner of the dining room like last time. There would be students who shook in fear because of Washio's death. Rather, there was no mistake that was the majority. Without thinking deeply, they left behind the supposedly safety of the kingdom, and one of their friends had died as a result. There would be students who was going to regret this choice.

The question whether the kingdom was truly safe or not was meaningless here. They themselves had made a choice and Washio had died as a result. The next one to die might very well be themselves. Such atmosphere was spreading in this place.

That was why Ryuzaki didn't plan on stepping down from the leader position. If the class was to fall apart here, the number of victim would increase even more. If they lost their spirit of cooperation and scattered in this mountain, what would happened as the result was clear as day.

"I won't make excuses. Blame me if you want to. But everyone must not fall apart here. Don't you think so?"

Without putting his emotion into his words as much as possible, Ryuzaki uninterestedly said so. *That's right, if me alone taking responsibility for this can keep the cooperation of the class, then it's good enough. Washio is dead, it's sad, it's terrifying, but we shouldn't be doing things such as being swept away by that temporary emotion or losing sight of what we should do right now.*

"Of course, I also do not intend to turn back the ship here."

"Ryuzaki, you...!"

Anger and sorrow welled up in Hakuba's voice.

"Tomorrow, we will hold a funeral for Washio. Until then, each person please

carry out the duties assigned to you properly. That's all."

"Ah, Ryuzaki-kun..."

Ryuzaki turned his back at everyone in the class and left with a quick pace. Sakuma called out to him from behind but he couldn't stop. As the commotion of the students gathered on the deck was becoming bigger, he could hear Sakuma's voice trying to put them in order again.

I'm pathetic. I said that much so self-importantly and left it to others in the end.

Like that, Ryuzaki opened the door of the captain room and secluded himself inside. As the inside of the heavy cruiser branch school warship profusely shook, the room was by no means comfortable. As soon as he closed the door, Ryuzaki rested his back on that door, then he slowly slid down onto the floor. Holding his head in both hands, he hung his head.

Washio Kouta has die. He was a frivolous guy ever since the time they were still humans, his joke wasn't very interesting, he used to look at the expression of others, used to follow along behind others, his favorites phrases was to grumble about work, 2nd favorite phrase was to say that he just wanted a girlfriend. That Washio Kouta, had died.

He worked harder than anyone else even though he was just an alternate for the basket ball club, when he unexpectedly came out in a championship match, purely decided by chance, he lead the team to victory in the Three-Point Shootout. That Washio Kouta, had died. When praising him for his everyday effort while treating him to hamburger on the way home after watching the game, he had awkwardly bragged 『*That's because I want to be popular with girls*』. That Washio Kouta, had died.

Ryuzaki's eyes were hot. He started sobbing, he couldn't stop his tears from overflowing out. Inside his head was a complete mess, he didn't know what he should think about anymore.

"Soorrry.... Washio..., I'm sorry...!"

Now, while thinking of his classmate who wouldn't come back anymore, Ryuzaki Kunihiro did nothing but shed tears in lamentation.

A bad atmosphere was prevalent inside the class. It was natural. One person among them had died.

Himemizu Rin came out on the deck and was spending time in a daze. She tried to invite Kyousuke as well, but that guy shut himself inside his room and wouldn't come out. In the end, she couldn't do anything for him. Perhaps, he was even forced to confirm his inside that he had always been looking away from due to Suou's remarks, then he had to part way with his classmate immediately afterward.

To help someone, to support someone purely to be appreciated, Kyousuke had barely maintained his humanity like that, but his classmate was killed before his own eyes. An empty box is fragile. Kyousuke's heart had been shattered.

Last time was his body, now his heart. Both of them were in pieces.

In the field established on the deck, Hanazono was silently gardening. Herbs resembling parsleys were steadily growing with the help of Hanazono's ability.

"Hana-chan."

When Rin called out, Hanazono Hana raised her face and smiled.

"It's a disaster, Himemizu-san."

"Yeah..."

Saying so, Hanazono once again diligently work on gardening. Since Hanazono was timid, Rin had thought that the matter this time would definitely break her heart and she would insist on wanting to go back, so this behavior was something unexpected. *Speaking of which, isn't that line of thought bad manner?* While Rin was thinking so, Hanazono said this.

"Washio-kun, he confessed to me once."

"Eh!?"

"I rejected him though. I mean, we have only been in the same class for about a week. There wasn't enough time to talk that much."

"Ah, right, yeah..."

Indeed, Rin recalled that there was such a rumors at the beginning of the first semester in their 2nd year. Anyway, Washio was thinking he wanted a girlfriend, so he carried out something like a door-to-door (sale) strategy and systematically called out to all of the girls in the class. Naturally, everything was an honorable defeat, the girls absolutely took no notice of him.

It was probably right after that event that he began buttering up Ryuzaki who

was in the top caste of the class.

“That time, I was tampering with the gardening club’s flower bed. We talked about flowers for a bit.”

“Yeah...”

“Is it because he died? I think he’s a good person.”

Hanazono think he’s a good person, thought Rin. *Memories are often beautified*, Rin had also heard such words before. However, as the students was afraid that they themselves might die next time, many of them couldn’t concentrate on their jobs. Among them, she was properly mourning Washio’s death.

“Hana-chan, what are you raising now?”

“Because the funeral is tomorrow, I thought to raise flowers. It isn’t the flowers that Washio-kun praised though.”

As Hanazono pointed out, there were fluffy flowers similar to white calyx gathered in large quantity.

“What is this?”

“Carrot.”

“Carrot...”

“Washio-kun, he liked carrots, so I could only come up with this idea.”

Hanazono was no longer as reluctant as before to offered the crops that she grew as food ingredients. With the condition that the seeds, seedlings were to be left behind properly, then those seeds would continue on to the next generation, she was now delivering root crops and leaf vegetables to Sugiura normally. [Notes]

Memories of Washio? Rin recalled.

Rin was in the track-and-field club, Washio was in the basketball club. They had been in the same class since 1st year, so there were relatively many chances to converse with each other. On the day of the closing ceremony in 1st year 3rd semester, he came up to Rin who was practicing short-distance race as usual and said to do a 1-on-1 basket ball match, so she kept him company just once. Then surprising even herself, Rin was dribbling well enough and she splendidly beat Washio black-and-blue. *This feels a bit awkward. I can only remember that*

much if it's about memories.

“Even so, he’s a good person, Washio-kun.”

Rin nodded. Even if she did have some impudent feelings regarding the deceased, he was by no means a bad person.

It was also possible for her to flare up in anger that he was killed. But that feeling had withered now.

“Yup. Aya-chan too, she said that she is going make a carrot party today and tomorrow.”

“For Washio-kun?”

“We decided this talk together. If we stop working, everyone will be in trouble. It’s sad, it’s scary, but I have to do what I can do now. Let’s work hard together step by step.”

“Together, step by step...”

Work hard. This, coincidentally, was the very same words that Rin had said in the battle some time ago.

To the goblins keeping watch at the gun turrets on the deck, it could be seen that Gofunkawahara was going around while calling out to them. Those goblins weren’t shock by Washio’s death. However, the same was true for Gofunkawahara and Okumura who didn’t receive that much shock. They also had a feeling of simply mourning for their classmate. But it didn’t appear to affect them at all. When she tried asking them just now, their answer was as followed.

『*Because we have also lost our precious one.*』

It was about Gofunkawahara’s big sister, 『*Yukari-san*』. What sort of illness did she have, how and when did she pass away? Rin didn’t know. However, since the other students couldn’t move, she had an impression that they who had overcome the death of their loved one, was moving around even more energetic than usual.

She also saw that Kaminari was consoling Nekomiya who received a big shock from the death of Washio as his team leader. As Nekomiya was a poser and a person who had great confidence in herself, it was difficult looking at her moping around like that. So Kaminari was accompanying such a girl and putting

out tender words to her.

She talked about how she wanted to return to their world together, how happy she was about that, and she said that she felt like doing her best even now because of that feeling. Still, Nekomiya blamed herself as the cause of Washio's death, but she somehow floated an expression as if she had been saved by Kaminari's words.

What everyone can do, they keep going on with it little by little.

The students of 2nd year class 4 was growing. Big or small, each of them had to face their respective problems, and while the changes were slow, they were advancing forward little by little. If the same thing had happened at the beginning of the trip, the class might have collapsed on that very same day.

I wonder what I myself can do? Rin thought.

For Kyouzuke. Or for Washio. Himemizu Rin wonder what she could do.

"Himemizu-san, the parsleys are going to be ready soon."

Hanazono said so a little happily.

"You're worried about Utsurogi-kun, aren't you? Since he likes parsleys, let's have him eat his fill of parsleys."

"Yup, that's right..."

On the deck of the heavy cruiser branch school running at the bottom of the valley, Rin was intently looking at the swaying parsleys for a while.

Worrying about Utsurogi Kyouzuke as well as Ryuzaki Kunihiro. Sakuma Sachiko bit her lips while walking in the passage inside the ship.

Behind her, there was also the number one delinquent girl of the class, Inugami Hibiki. A literary girl and a delinquent girl. It was a combination unimaginable at the time they were still humans. Inugami who was walking behind Sakuma, had an expression several tens percent more sullen than usual.

Washio Kouta has died. When she received this report, Sakuma's head turned blank.

Even if they didn't talk much in the past, he was still her classmate. It wasn't a simple death, he was killed. She didn't know what to think of it, so she was stunned for a while, and when she came to her sense, what welled up within her first wasn't grief and sorrow but fear.

This is Sakuma who had passed through so many life-threatening situations ever since she had reincarnated as a succubus up until now. It could even be said to be a miraculous phenomenon that her fear of death was paralyzed and didn't appear up until now, but with the death of her classmate, that fear started rearing its ugly head.

That fear had been suppressed by the existence of Utsurogi Kyouzuke. That Kyouzuke had witnessed the death of Washio with his own eyes, even if he was to pass by Sakuma, he didn't say a single word to her and just shut himself inside his room. Rin who was with him, only briefly said to Sakuma like this. *『I'm sorry, I couldn't protect Utsurogi-kun.』*

Kyouzuke's hollow attitude and Rin's mortifying words said everything. At that moment, Sakuma who had been helped by Kyouzuke until now knew for sure that it was her turn to help him out. Rin had been trying to do it all this while.

With the death of Washio, there were subtle changes happening inside the class.

Among them, the most surprising one to Sakuma was the changes to Inugami Hibiki. As a lone wolf of the class and a delinquent, there was no need for her to show any concern about Washio's death, or so Sakuma thought. However, as far as Sakuma saw it, the one who flared up with the purest of anger when receiving Ryuzaki's report was without a doubt Inugami.

『I'm going to Akai's place, Sakuma.』

Inugami curtly said so.

『Asuka-chan's place?』

『I was wondering what to do up until now, but I will interrogate that vampire this time for sure.』

In those words, she could feel a deep connection between Inugami and Akai. Sakuma had always felt doubtful why Inugami could perceive the existence of the Blood of Red Moon. That wasn't all. Whenever Inugami spoke of Akai, she always had that same eyes as when she spoke of Red Moon.

"Inugami-san..."

While walking along the corridor, Sakuma suddenly started speaking.

“What?”

“Washio-kun, that is, are you angry because he died...?”

“Ahh.”

She heard the same brusque voice as usual from behind.

“I, any more than this, I cannot forgive the guy who kill people in my surroundings.”

“You mean, Asuka-chan?”

“I guess I will go confirm it with that girl.”

Sakuma came in front of Akai’s door, and adjusting her breath, she knocked.

“Asuka-chan. It’s me.”

『Sachi? Come in.』

From the other side of the door, she heard an unchanged tone of voice. Sakuma nodded to Inugami and opened the door.

Sitting in a chair and looking out from the circular window, Akai Asuka looked back. Upon recognizing Inugami behind Sakuma, Akai’s face immediately turned sullen.

“...Why is Inugami with you?”

“If I say I’m here to settle the scores for the clan and then for Washio’s part as well, would you believe it?”

“.....”

Akai narrowed her eyes and glared at Inugami, and after that, she looked at Sakuma. Her eyes were asking Sakuma this question. *Did you hear the story?* Sakuma shook her head, but then she resolutely asserted her words.

“Asuka-chan, I have a request.”

“What?”

“Please tell me everything that Asuka-chan knows.”

Something about Akai had been strange ever since she came to this world. Her lack of cooperation to group action was something from a long time ago. It was because she showed an excessive rejection response to anything called 『order』. However, while her classmates were going through trial-and-error in order to use their own ability, Akai was able to freely manipulate her blood

from the very beginning and she also knew about the side effects of her blood. That wasn't everything. Before, when the devil from Red Moon attacked the base, the one who defeated that devil was most likely Akai. It was obvious that Akai was hiding her true strength.

And then, there was Inugami's attitude regarding Akai. Her speech and conduct today.

The 『*problem*』 that Akai had told Kyouzuke also, she felt that it wasn't something unrelated.

Pressed by Sakuma, Akai floated a bewildered expression.

"No matter if it's Sachi, this is..."

"Washio-kun has already died!"

Sakuma raised a loud voice. She wondered if it was cowardly to bring out the name of the deceased here.

"Not just Washio-kun! The next one to die, could be Utsurogi-kun, could be Ryuzaki-kun, Harui-san and Hebetsuka-san ... and perhaps, it could be me."

However, Sakuma didn't stop. The fear that had been confined in the innermost depth of her heart took shape into words.

Washio Kouta had died. However, Washio wouldn't be the only victim at this rate. Akai was aware of something. By any chance, it could become a clue to break the deadlock in the up coming situation.

"I don't intend to spread the rumors in particular, vampire."

Inugami laughed grinningly.

"But your — true colors, if it's that much do excuse me if I tell Sakuma about it."

"Inugami..."

At that moment, Akai Asuka was floating a rare grudging expression.

"Asuka-chan, please..."

When Sakuma took her hands, Akai breathed a big sigh.

Then the Queen looked all around the sailor's room assigned to her that was by no means wide, and finally turned her line of sight outside the round window.

“I understand. Sachi, as well as Inugami.”

Akai Asuka murmured little by little.

“I will explain to you guys. There’s also a limit to what I can do alone.”

“Mu...?”

As Goubayashi was walking inside the valley, he found strange tracks on the ground.

The tracks were as if a bulldozer or an excavator had passed through. It was the so-called caterpillar track, but something that big wasn’t common. For once, the width of the tracks were more than 5 meters, and the distance between the left and right caterpillars tracks were close to 30 meters. Seeing that much, he thought that it was closer a land battleship rather than something fantasy-like.

Speaking of battleships, I recall that I once saw that wreckage of a battleship when leaving the base.

I wonder if Ryuzaki and the others are doing well. Zeku who was sent back midway, did he deliver that human girl safely? When thinking about it, I have come a long way.

Gazing at the «ogre» within himself again, Goubayashi could reconfirm it, so he wanted to return to their base and joined up with everyone if it was possible. However, that required a little bit more time.

It had been a long time since he lost sight of Kaoruko.

It was triggered by the attack of Red Wing. Goubayashi, who became a decoy in order to let Kaoruko escape, had suffered a serious wound and was on the verge of death. Since he was protected by the hands of humans after that, and he had even received generous treatment and training so that in itself wasn’t in vain. However, he ended up losing sight of Kaoruko’s whereabouts.

That fellow was fast only at escaping. I would like to think that fellow has managed to escape properly.

Anyway, these caterpillar tracks are very worrisome. For there to be this kind of things deep in the mountains that was supposed to be unexplored.

It may be better to try following it for a while.

While his mantle trailing from his shoulder pads, Goubayashi chased after the

caterpillar tracks.

Chapter 36: Her Confession, His Return

The first time Sakuma Sachiko met Akai Asuka was at the time of forming groups in kindergarten. Although Akai already had a mature atmosphere since childhood and wouldn't initiate a conversation with others on her own, she was never a bad child.

As Sakuma of that time was also a quiet child who likes to spend time reading picture books, Sakuma recalled that she and Akai had caused quite a lot of troubles for the kindergarten teachers. She had already forgotten what was the trigger of it, but because there were two people who liked to read picture books by themselves, the teachers somehow ended up putting the two of them together. And their relationship started ever since that time.

Including Kaoruko here, the three of them, had attended primary school throughout middle school together, and while not exactly arranged beforehand, they had also ended up going to the same high school. Kaoruko started being in the same class as them since 1st year of primary school, her seat was close to Akai and she just randomly got involved with her, and she became their friends ever since.

The three of them were completely different types of people, especially around the time they became middle school students and each of them started hanging out with different people, but even then, when it comes to days off, they would often have fun together. *Let's keep it a secret*, it wasn't that they had made such a childish agreement, but even so, they could generally understand about each others.

However,

"...Then, Asuka-chan, even at that time, you are, err, umm ... already a vampire?"

"Well, I must admit."

Fuu~, with a sigh, Akai answered.

Naturally, this confession was a bolt out of the blue for Sakuma, and she had difficulty accepting by only listening. The subject of what Akai Asuka had spoken

was crazy to that extent. Akai Asuka was a pure-blood vampire since she was born.

That is to say, even at that time when she was playing house together with Sakuma in kindergarten, she wasn't human all along.

Akai recrossed her legs on the chairs. Behind Sakuma, Inugami was leaning her back against the wall, with her arms crossed, she glared at Akai.

This was a story that she couldn't understand. NOT. It should be plenty to think of this as the reason why Akai was completely aware of her own abilities instead. However, this matter was indeed too unexpected and it took a while before Sakuma could accept the story.

"Inugami-san is also a werewolf from the start?"

"That's — right."

Inugami with her arms crossed, snorted roughly and looked up at the ceiling.

"Well, my situation is different from Akai, there's no such things as friends left for me."

And yet, a gaze that was still sharp was directed toward Akai.

A delinquent girl, Inugami Hibiki, since the very same day she joined their class, she had always hated the very sight of Akai. Even Akai as well, Sakuma knew that she had shown an attitude of avoiding Inugami somewhat. Vampires and Werewolves. It wasn't certain whether the two of them were aware of each others' true form before the transference. Nevertheless, it is easy to imagine that the two races themselves were in conflict.

Then, the remaining question is the relationship between Akai and that Blood of Red Moon.

From her way of speaking so far, it was obvious that there was a connection between Akai and Red Moon. And before this, there were also the words of the red winged devil toward Inugami at the time when he attacked the base. His attitude was obviously aggressive toward Inugami. Fragmentary information rose up in a form that was by no means desirable.

"Asuka-chan, Asuka-chan and Red Moon, Asuka-chan and Inugami-san, what kind of relationships there are...?"

Akai turned her face toward Sakuma at that question. While mixed feelings were wavering in her blood-colored eyes, she intently stared at Sakuma. It was the first time Sakuma saw Akai like this. Although Akai had been hesitating to speak for a while, in the end, she said this clearly.

“Red Moon is one of the blood clans of the vampires. And then, I’m one of them.”

It was like that as expected, thought Sakuma. *Finally, the lines are connected together.*

But then, Akai uttered even heavier words.

“We have been hostile toward Inugami’s clan for a long time in a struggle for survival. In the end, they were destroyed, weren’t they?”

“Eh...”

“Yes, and then, I’m the only survivor of that clan.”

Saying that much, Inugami raised her body that was leaning against the wall. She thrust her hands into (the pockets of) the jersey wore on top of her sailor uniform, then in a stooping posture, she stepped up to Akai with big strides. Coming up right next to Sakuma who was acting like an idiot, Inugami, while her facial expression distorted into one of hostility, brought her face close to Akai.

“Hey, Akai. Even I, am not thinking about idiotic things like opposing the Queen in particular. After coming here, you were awfully quiet, you didn’t even show any sign of making a move when the Pawn came.”

Akai’s clan destroyed Inugami’s clan. It was not a metaphor or the likes, the meaning was probably literal. As far as Sakuma was concerned, what was really shocking was most probably the fact that it was done in the former world where she lived.

She didn’t think that the world was peaceful. But it was absolutely unbelievable that vampires and werewolves were in a dispute wagering the right to live itself, and then the situation had developed into the point where one of them had been destroyed.

“But Washio is dead. Is that fine? I don’t mean that I hold any feeling of camaraderie with the bunch in the class. Nevertheless, a classmate has been killed. It was by the hands of none other than the blood clan of you guys. As one

would expect, I cannot stay silent anymore than this.”

“So you came storming in bringing Sachi along?”

“That’s right. If Sakuma is present, you will almost never refuse, and you also cannot kill her in desperation.”

“Wait, wait.”

Sakuma rushed up and stopped Inugami who was glaring at Akai and seemed to jump at her any time soon.

“Wait, wait a moment. I said I want you to tell me everything that you know but.... Things like this, there are too much information and my head seems to be a little confused. Eh, that is, Asuka-chan, umm, is the Queen of Red Moon?”

“I do not like that way of calling very much.”

After answering a little bluntly, Akai nodded.

“But that’s right. We assumed the names of chess pieces as our titles, in the highest position is King or should I say the King, after that is Queen, Rook, *etc.* It’s like that. So childish it’s laughable.”

Saying so, mockery was visible on Akai’s face, but was that mockery really directed toward the blood clan or toward herself?

“I won’t make excuses about the destruction of Inugami’s clan. But it was a story of when we were still children.”

“Regarding us, how did we come to this world and became this appearance?”

“Because the world over there has already become rather difficult to live in, the King of our household made a plan to migrate to a different world. But that guy has high pride. He said that just escaping to a different world and stay secretly in the shadow, living while having to hold your breath is unpleasant.”

“The war is because of that?”

“Quite so. It seems that their patience ran out and they started their attack, but the task entrusted to me was the preparation to replenish the war potential. The Transference Denaturation Gate developed by Akeno changes the making of the body of «*humans*». To be more accurate, it’s not limited to humans but also things on their person like clothes, but well, that’s why Inugami and my appearance didn’t change since we are not «*humans*».”

As Akai explained in a matter-of-factly attitude, Sakuma felt a little vague fear.

From the words that came out of her mouth, the plan of Red Moon was something like turning all students of 2nd year class 4 into monsters, then using them as they were as game pieces in the invasion of the different world. She couldn't believe that Akai, as a friend whom she had been associating with for more than 10 years, would calmly support that kind of thing. The Akai Asuka in front of her, and the appearance of Akai Asuka who was Sakuma Sachiko's bestest friend didn't overlap and had started to blur. Perhaps Sakuma's anxiety had appeared in her attitude. Akai's expression was a little lonely.

"Enough about that. What's your true feelings, Akai?"

The one who gave out a lifeboat to Akai was unexpectedly Inugami.

"If you are complicit in that plan, there should have been a chance to gather the class together and go back under those lots. Maybe the time when Goubayashi disappeared for example. I guess there was a reason for not doing that. Tell us about that, reassure me and Sakuma."

Certainly, that's right. Taking the words from Akai, her purpose should have been taking along the students of 2nd year class 4 and joining up with the army of Red Moon, expanding their forces over here. But she didn't do that. On the contrary, not only did she not respond at all to the two visits of her companions, she even killed the other party once. Sakuma became ashamed of herself to have doubted Akai even for a moment. *There is absolutely no way she would be thinking of selling out her classmates of 2nd year class 4.* When Sakuma once again looked straight at Akai from the front, Akai sighed for the umpteenth time.

"I want to be more free."

Akai told a remark that she had sometimes said to Sakuma.

"Because I don't want to be dominated and ordered around anymore.... Therefore, I..."

"Yup."

Sakuma nodded while trying not to miss even a single word. Akai turned her face away a little awkwardly and scratched her cheek.

“...Do I absolutely have to say something like this?”

“We cannot be relieved if you don’t say it.”

Inugami dropped her waist on the hard bed and said so. Since Sakuma was also asked with her eyes, she nodded her head.

Suu~, Akai breathed in and muttered in resignation.

“Sachi, I don’t intend to betray you guys, I, already don’t feel like being dominated by that King ever again. So err, umm...”

“Don’t be indecisive. You’re always putting on airs so just say it.”

“Noisy.... Don’t worry Sachi, because we are friends.”

For the first time, Akai gazed straight at Sakuma’s eyes. Her snow white skin was slightly flushed. *To think that today would be a day when I could see various expressions from my best friend that I didn’t know of up until now.* When Sakuma wasn’t able to say anything for a while, Akai’s expression clouded a little.

“...Friends, right?”

“Yup, we’re friends, Asuka-chan.”

Sakuma tightly embraced Akai. The girl in Sakuma’s arms was bewildered for a short while, but then she gently stroked her head as usual.

“Thank you for telling me.”

“Yeah...”

The class was upset because of Washio’s death. Even Sakuma was as well. However, it was a big harvest that she clearly knew about the enemies as well as her friends at this timing. Thinking about Akai’s matter, this story shouldn’t be told to her classmates. Still, the information that was unclear until now had become clear all at once.

“Ah, that’s right.”

Suddenly, Sakuma released Akai’s body. Akai tilted her head curiously.

“Sachi?”

“Asuka-chan, there is one more thing I want to ask...”

It was about Utsurogi Kyousuke. *What is the problem he has been carrying? Is*

there any special intention when he was given blood?

When she tried to ask about this, the hull of the heavy cruiser branch school was attacked by a big impact.

“Wawaa, wha—what!?”

After a strong shock attacked the hull, the heavy cruiser branch school stopped moving. That was Rin shouting on the deck. In front of Rin’s eyes, Hanazono’s head plunged deeply into the field and she was kicking and struggling with all her might. The goblins running around the deck was rushing around restlessly. While Gofunkawahara was giving out instructions, Okumura and Zeku also rushed out from the cabin.

“Go—Gofunkawahara-kun, what happened!?”

“I don’t know!”

To Rin’s shout while pulling Hanazono up, Gofunkawahara shouted back.

“Something seem to have collided with the ship, but the fog is dense so I cannot see it well!”

As Gofunkawahara had said, the effective field of vision was only enough to just barely confirm the terrain of their surroundings. For this reason, the heavy cruiser branch school had also been moving forward with a greatly reduced speed. The slope with the conifer forest densely grown had also disappeared from view, and sandwiching both side of the ship were just dull bare rocks now. However, there was a strange feeling that this fog was no good. Right beside her, while tending to the carrots at her own pace, Hanazono muttered.

“Speaking of which, I have read a novel about a monster coming out of the fog before—.”

“He, he~e—. What sort of novel is that?”

“It maybe better not to ask.”

Then why did you mention it? Faster than she could tsukkomi, a goblin’s scream came from behind.

Turning around, at the area around the bow of the warship, «*something*» that seemed long, thick and slimy was about to drag a goblin to the other side of the fog.

“As if I would allow that!!”

Gofunkawahara jumped at the gun turret and fired the machine gun at that «*something*». Lead bullets intermittently flew out and there was sound like flesh tearing. Blood splattered on the deck, the goblin’s body was thrown away.

“Giii...!”

The goblin had severe cuts on its body but it was still breathing. Gofunkawahara gave instruction to the other goblins to carry the wounded goblin inside the ship.

“Himemizu, Okumura, did you see it just now?”

“Y–yeah...!”

“It was something like a snake debu.”

While all people present nodded to each other, the ogre Zeku also clenched his fists and kept a close watch to his surroundings.

Snake. It was unmistakably a snake. However, its length was at least 10 meters, and even its thickness was about 2 meters. It was just a big snake, but the situation is that the snake was lurking on the other side of this fog. No, assuming it was coiling around the hull, it had to be much longer than what could be seen.

“Hana-chan, get in the cabin for now!”

“Y–yeah...!”

Rin took Hanazono, a non-combatant, to a safe place. Meanwhile, Gofunkawahara and Okumura, Zeku and the Goblins were glaring at the surroundings.

A snake head again extended as if breaking through the fog. Okumura and Zeku who noticed it first, cooperated together and caught it. Being held down by the two boasting of their super human strength, the snake struggled in irritation. From what Rin could see, this «*snake*» was more than she thought. Its tongue was slithering in and out from its mouth, and its pinned down jaws were trying to open somehow.

When Gofunkawahara gave a signal, the goblins at every turrets pointed the tips of the machine guns toward the snake. Just as Rin came back to the deck after escorting Hanazono to the cabin, she found several swaying shadows

emerging from inside the fog.

“Gofunkawahara-kun, behind!” [Rants]

“Huh, uoo—?”

Receiving Rin’s warning, Gofunkawahara just barely managed to dodge a different snake head jumping at his place.

However, the snake head jumped in as if to strike the deck, the hull (of the ship) shook greatly causing Okumura and Zeku to let go of the snake head they were grabbing.

“What, it’s not just one!?”

Gofunkawahara shouted while keeping his eyes on the surroundings. The shadows that had appeared inside the fog all seemed to be snake heads.

“I’m just guessing, but maybe all the heads belong to one body debu.”

[Reminders]

“Is that something like Yamata no Orochi?”

Okumura nodded to Rin’s question. Yamata no Orochi, or possibly Hydra. A kind of multi-headed dragon often told in folklore. What Rin and the others knew was obviously knowledge from the former world, but it wouldn’t be strange even if a similar monster also existed in this world.

But this was the worst timing for it to come out. Even at the best of time, this situation with poor visibility was bad enough. And then, the classmates’ spirit was practically at the lowest possible value.

“Wha—what’s happening!”

“Enemy attack. It’s quite enormous.”

Some of their classmates including Kensaki came out from the cabin. Gofunkawahara answered.

All students who came out to the deck were members of combat groups. They probably sensed the abnormality and rushed out, but it seemed that there were also students whose legs were trembling slightly. The shock from Washio’s death had yet to leave them.

“Wa, waaaaa!!”

From a blind spot of all people present, a snake head extended out and

caught one student in its mouth.

“Kinogasa!!”

In that state, the snake, aka the hydra, tried to drag Kinogasa into the fog, but Kensaki slashed at it. Toward that Kensaki, two more hydra heads extended. As for this, Zeku and Okumura, as well as Kagoi and the others prevented it. This hydra was a formidable enemy. With the current situation where their footings was unstable, they couldn't fight back. Just as Rin was feeling impatient, there was a voice came from behind.

“Hi–Himemizu...”

“Utsurogi-kun!?”

Turning around, the usual skeleton was standing there. He should have been shutting himself in his room until just now.

“Wha–what's wrong...!?”

“The ship was shaking.... So I thought something may have happened...”

“But, but ... is Utsurogi-kun okay...!?”

Rin asked while hiding in the shadow of the cabin which seemed to be a blind spot from the hydra. Rin also understood well the mental shock that Kyousuke had received. First was a shock from having to look straight at the problem holding within himself that he had never looked at up until now. And immediately after that, there was a shock from the scene where his classmate was killed right in front of his eyes.

“I don't know but ... there's no choice other than fighting now...”

Saying so, Kyousuke turned his line of sight toward the battle on the deck. If you include the goblins, this side would win in terms of number, but that hydra was a strong enemy. Inside the class, the number of combat personnel with Phase 2 was few in number, so if the two of them were to help out in the state of Stream Cross, the battle situation would changed to some extent.

But then, is it okay for Kyousuke to fight in that state? Rin was lost. It was because she couldn't understand what kind of emotion was moving Kyousuke now. Was it impulse, a sense of duty or something else entirely different?

“Himemizu, quick...!”

“Y–yeah...”

Looking at Kyouzuke who shouted like he had lost his patience somewhat, Rin finally consented to his words.

“Let’s go, Utsurogi-kun.”

“Ahh.”

As Kyouzuke nodded, Rin attached to him, winding, wrapping up his whole body. When Rin tried to make a human shape over his whole body, she noticed a sense of discomfort. Compared to usual, her body was awfully heavy and painful. This sensation, as if,

“Kyaa!”

Rin screamed and immediately fell onto the floor **becha**.

“Himemizu...?”

“I—I’m sorry I’m sorry. My body doesn’t get on well for some reasons...”

Rin put her hands on Kyouzuke’s body and tried challenging combination for the second time, but she slipped off in the same way as before.

In any case, it was strange. Even if she climbed onto Kyouzuke’s body, she didn’t get a sense of being supported as usual. Her whole body felt out of place, as if sitting on thin air. No matter how many times she tried challenging it, the same thing happened. Rin’s body couldn’t overlap with Kyouzuke’s body.

Combine, is impossible.

“...My, my fault...?”

Kyouzuke took 2, 3 steps back and fell down while barely muttering.

“Utsurogi-kun...”

“I, I have realized the truth of my own heart ... because of that ...”

Rin knew the process of how Kyouzuke’s heart was shaken. She had been in a combine state with him at that time and Kyouzuke’s heart was directly transmitted to her.

Kyouzuke had this emotion inside himself. It was the result of focusing his eyes on that emotion, *I just want to help someone, I just want to support someone*, and then, *I just want to receive gratitude*. Moreover, he ended up being

«convinced» that I guess it doesn't matter who the other party is, I just don't care at all about the humans around me.

Rin didn't want to think that Kyouzuke was a coldhearted person like that.

However, Kyouzuke himself was doubting his humanity.

"Himemizu, sorry ... I ..."

"Both of you, if you cannot fight, stand down!!"

When Kyouzuke just barely squeezed out his words, they heard Gofunkawahara's shouting voice.

"Not just Utsurogi group! Those who think even a little bit that they cannot fight, step back!"

Following Gofunkawahara's shout, several students beginning with Kinogasa escaped from the deck to the cabin.

Utsurogi Kyouzuke dumbfoundedly stood stock still. Rin tried to push that body into the cabin somehow. Kyouzuke's delirious mutterings of apologies was painful to look at. No matter how much she touched Kyouzuke's body, Rin couldn't read his heart as she used to.

I cannot combine with Kyouzuke now.

That fact feels like it symbolizes the distance between our hearts are helplessly growing further apart, Rin couldn't help thinking so.

"UOOOOOO!!"

At that moment, a little late to the party, Ryuzaki came flying at the Hydra. As for Rin, she had no choice but to watch her classmates battling the hydra with impatient feelings.

Running through the deck in his complete dragon form, with overall body length reaching about 10 meters, Ryuzaki crushed one of the snake head.

"DO NOT PUT YOUR HANDS ON MY CLASSMAATTEESSS!!"

A breath flashed together with a roar. The class representative Ryuzaki Kunihiro looked around the deck in a circle.

Gofunkawahara, Okumura, Kensaki, Kagoi, Uozumi, Zeku as well as the goblins. They were all safe. But he couldn't afford to just sigh in relief. Ryuzaki used both

of his hands to threaten the many shadows surround the heavy cruiser branch school.

“Gofunkawahara, what’s the situation?”

“The damage is zero for now. But it’s quite strong. This thing.”

The monster in front of them was probably a hydra. There was a description about similar monsters in the memo Selena left behind. The most famous one was the Marsh Hydra appeared in the wetland region to the South of the Empire, but aside from that they also inhabited various other locations. Their population wasn’t that many but they’re monsters with a high degree of danger.

Hydras were said to be biological weapons left behind by a wicked magician who tried to take over this world several hundreds years ago. Some of the individuals who lived through that age were still alive even now, and in such cases, their combat strength was much higher than the ones that were born in present time and increased their number.

Even considering the fact that this place was a former site of the fallen kingdom, this hydra had to be one of individual living since that time.

“Oi Ryuzaki, you’re good to go already?”

Gofunkawahara asked while looking anxious. Ryuzaki nodded.

“How much longer can I keep crying. I cannot let victims come out from my class anymore.”

“Ah—, so you were crying after all...”

When saying so, it was noticed. No matter how hard he tried, as expected, it seemed to be exposed when the onlookers saw this.

“But then Ryuzaki, wait a bit you...”

“UOOOOO!!”

“O—oi...!!”

Without listening to Gofunkawahara trying to stop him, Ryuzaki roared and charged at the hydra. *The maximum priority is to protect my classmates now. It was my careless decisions that lead the class into danger, and now the things that I can do is nothing other than fighting.*

That line of thought was merely to escape from the guilty conscience tormenting his heart, but Ryuzaki didn't realize it.

Ryuzaki charged at one of the hydra heads and bit its neck. The nails of his forefeet bit in deeply and he was putting in more power into his jaws. But the hydra didn't have just only one head. The heads of the hydra, which were crowding in the surroundings, simultaneously aimed at Ryuzaki and bit his arms, neck, wings and tail as if to return the favor.

"Ryuzaakiii! You idioott!!?"

Hearing Kensaki's shouting voice, Gofunkawahara gave instructions to the goblins.

"Gun turrets, aim at the snake heads!"

"Giiii!"

"Gigiiii!"

The goblins fired the machine guns, some of the shots scattered blood from the heads of the hydra. Ryuzaki also took some of the stray bullets, but thanks to the sturdy dragon scales, it didn't result in big damage. The hydra shrieked and flung Ryuzaki's body into the air. As it was, he was thrown down to the deck.

"Class rep, pull yourself together."

While Kagoi the Gargoyle rushed up to Ryuzaki, he spread his wings and floated up to the air. He attracted the several heads of the hydra that were trying to pursue Ryuzaki.

"Didn't you said it yourself that you cannot afford to step down from the leader's seat?!"

"If you understand your own value to that extent, don't fight in a way that treat yourself so lightly!"

While launching scales like bullets, Uozumi threw out abusive language. Kensaki also nodded while floating in the air by treating Kagoi as a stepping stone and slashed (at the hydra).

Ryuzaki, while standing up on the deck, clenched his fists. It felt like his heart was completely stripped bare. *After all, it appears that I have once again shown*

a such a disgraceful behavior. There is a slight self-deprecation, change that self-deprecation to prudence.

“Even if you go wild, even if you regret, the dead won’t ever come back debu.”

Okumura stood next to Ryuzaki and said.

“If you say you don’t want to increase the death count, then first of all make sure that you yourself aren’t the number two victim.”

Gofunkawahara also said. The words of those two were especially heavy. Ryuzaki nodded again.

The hydra had 9 heads, among them, 3 heads had been crushed, 6 remained. Hydra is a monster with very high vitality, it will regenerate in a few hours even if some heads are crushed. So they had to either crush all of its heads or aim at its heart, but in this case, it was enough if they could drive it into retreating.

Gofunkawahara decided to aim at the wounded head and gave out instructions to bring it down. Kagoi stopped the attack of that snake head, and Okumura pinned it down from the side. Kensaki took a stance with her sword and leaped at it. They also had to prevent the attacks by the 5 remaining heads one way or another.

According to Gofunkawahara’s instructions, the goblins at the gun turrets restrained one of the heads, and Uozumi’s scale bullets intercepted another. Ryuzaki pinned down one of the heads with his arms and held one more different head with his jaws.

One remained. Ryuzaki moved his tail but the hydra head slipped through it and swooped down on Kensaki.

“.....!!”

Zeku, who was still free, cut in between and tried to pin down the snake head. However, the hydra’s jaws opened widely and immediately bit down on Zeku’s body.

“Zeku!”

Okumura raised a scream. The fangs of the hydra all came out and pierced deeply into Zeku’s steel-like muscle, blood scattered on the deck.

That guy is also my classmate. There is no good reason to abandon him. Ryuzaki tried to help him, but his body was conversely entwined by the hydra neck and had its freedom snatched away.

The snake head held Zeku strongly in its jaws and tried to disappear into the fog, but at that moment, **dopan**, there was that sound and its neck burst open and flew away.

It was completely torn to pieces as if it took a shot from the heavy cruiser branch school main battery, the 20 cm cannon. However, there was no traces that the main battery mounted on the deck was fired when they look at it. In the first place, Kyousuke had previously cautioned that firing it in a melee is a taboo, so it was expected that no one would shoot it in such a circumstance.

Then what was it?

Ryuzaki witnessed as a shadow that wasn't there up until now got down from on top of the hydra head, which had fallen on the deck.

"Ah..."

Everyone who was present on the deck simultaneously opened their eyes wide. A giant of about 3 meters in height, dragged out his brethren with the same appearance from the hydra's jaws and laid that guy who was faintly breathing down on the deck and said.

"Zeku, you have done well! Be proud as someone from the same ogre race."

The giant was wearing shoulder pads and a mantle that he shouldn't have been wearing when he left the base. He had two horns grew on his head and a muscular body. And then, there was a glint in his sanpaku eyes. Golden energy was rising from his body as he glared at the hydra. And this time, the man who came back said this to everyone who was present — — — especially toward Ryuzaki.

"Sorry. I'm late."

Chapter 37: For the Sake of Looking Forward

“Are, are you ... Goubayashi...?”

To Ryuzaki’s enquiry, that ogre slowly nodded.

“Ahh, it’s me.”

The sound of that voice hadn’t changed at all from the time he last heard it one and a half month ago. It was strong, deep and full of dignity, it was none other than the voice of Ryuzaki Kunihiro’s best friend, Goubayashi Genshuu. The golden energy rising from his body showed that he had overcome many hardships and shifted to Phase 2.

Ryuzaki wanted to shout in joy, he also wanted to cling to Goubayashi in tears. He also had many stories piled up, and honestly speaking, he also had many resentful complaints. If it was Ryuzaki of a month ago, he might have easily said it.

The hydra’s heads revealed vigilance before the sudden intruder. While the tongues of the remaining five heads slithered, they withdrew into the fog in order to take some distance.

Ryuzaki shelved all of the emotions welling up inside and rebuilt his posture. He looked at Goubayashi, and then turning his eyes over to Zeku, whose body was laid down on the deck. *How long would the endurance of an ogre can hold?* As long as he believed in the memo Selena left behind, he thought that there should still be some leeway. But still, it wasn’t okay to just leave him rolling around for a long time.

“Uozumi, is your sister okay?” [Reminders]

“It’s no good. Masuyo is completely down now.”

“Is that so, Hakuba is immobile as well...”

What was on Ryuzaki’s mind was that no user of recovery magic was in this place. This would inevitably force them into a worse and worse situation when fighting a formidable enemy.

Kaoruko who was acting together with Goubayashi could use recovery magic as well but her shadow couldn’t be found anywhere.

“Ladies and gentlemen, I have kept you waiting, have you been looking for me?”

He heard a pretentious voice and a figure of a black cat wearing leather boots showed up on the deck.

It was Nekomiya Miya the Cait Sith. Behind her, Kaminari Totoha the Thunderbird suddenly peeked out her face from the shadow of the cabin.

“Nekomiya, you’re cool already?”

“I was scolded by Kaminari. If you have time to blame yourself, think about what you can do for Washio.”

Nekomiya shrugged her shoulders at Ryuzaki’s question. For an instant, Goubayashi frowned at the change in the atmosphere but he didn’t say anything.

“Well, it’s just common sophistry though. But if it was said by the easily frightened Kaminari, there’s no way I can just stay idle. I thought.”

This girl is still as troublesome as ever. Still, I’m grateful that she will move for us.

“Nekomiya, I ask for recovery magic. The top priority is Zeku.”

“Class rep? You’re all bloody though?”

“I can still last. Goubayashi, you’ve just returned but I’ll have you work.”

“No problem. I came back for that reason.”

Goubayashi crossed his arms without making any slight movement, but the energy rising from his body was increasing its momentum all the more.

“You got bigger, Ryuzaki.”

And trying to hide his embarrassment, he mention the thing about Ryuzaki’s body.

“They’re coming!”

At the same time Kensaki shouted, four of the hydra heads plunged at this place all at once.

“Kagoi and Kensaki, Okumura and Uozumi, each group takes one!”

After promptly giving out instructions, Ryuzaki fiercely bit at one of the

attacking head. Similarly, Goubayashi also caught one of the heads with both his arms. Gofunkawahara instructed the goblins to be ready for the surprise attack of the last snake head.

Immediately after that, Ryuzaki saw Goubayashi, who was right beside him, took an unthinkable action.

“HAAaaaa.....———!”

Goubayashi suppressed the head with one log-like arm and then converged the golden energy rising from his body into the other free arm. The energy compressed in his right arm was emitting radiance quite like the sun. That scene burned very strongly into the view on the deck of the heavy cruiser branch school covered with fog.

“Fuun!!”

The moment he struck with that right arm, that energy exploded. The hydra head that Goubayashi was in charge of easily scattered away whether that fist did touch it or not, the impact resulting from that shook the heavy cruiser branch school. The after-effect of that explosion attacked the other heads as well, and naturally, Ryuzaki had also stumbled a few steps forward.

There was one of Goubayashi’s favorite motto, 『*Observe carefully a youth you haven’t met for three days*』. Ryuzaki, as his friend, intended to grow without deviating from that statement, but it seemed that the same thing applied to Goubayashi as well.

Can we defeat it?

Ryuzaki let his nails bite deeply into the hydra head and drove in a breath a point-blank range. The hideously burnt head that was suffering in agony, was captured in his big jaws and crunched.

Goubayashi turned to assist Okumura and Uozumi who were struggling.

Kneading the golden fighting spirit, he kicked and smashed the hydra head that the two people were pinning down with utmost effort. With almost the same timing, Kensaki lopped off one head with her prided single slash.

One left. Ryuzaki glared into the fog but the valley was quiet to the point of being ominous. *Zuru, zuru*, sound like something crawling could be heard from starboard of the heavy cruiser branch school, and simultaneously, the

hydra heads abandoned on the deck slipped and fell as if they were being dragged by something.

“Feel like it ran away.”

Nekomiya with her cat ears stretching tensely muttered.

“In the direction of our route?”

“It’s okay. There doesn’t seem to be anything.”

“I understand. Gofunkawahara!”

Ryuzaki shouted while Nekomiya rushed up to him and healed his wounds with her *《Shadow Heal》*.

“Ou!”

“Inform Kuremori. Engine at maximum, we’re leaving this valley at once!”

“Aye aye, class rep!”

After suddenly taking a gesture similar to a salute, Gofunkawahara ran out of the deck.

Ryuzaki canceled his *《Complete Dragonization》* and confirmed his wounds again. A part of his scale peeled off and blood was flowing. But well, injuries about this much was a usual thing. Not that it didn’t hurt but there were many things more important than that, and Nekomiya was also healing his wounds at the moment.

Ryuzaki looked at Goubayashi’s appearance. It wasn’t just Ryuzaki alone. Kensaki and Okumura group, as well as Zeku were also staring at the man who had returned.

“It seems that a good deal of different things have happened.”

Said Goubayashi.

“Ahh, there were a lots of fun things, as well as sad things.”

“Really...”

Crossing his arms, Goubayashi silently nodded. While Kensaki put away her sword, she timidly asked.

“Goubayashi, Kaoruko is...?”

“Ahh, there are many things to talk about, including that matter. Let’s organize

our information for a moment.”

“Really, Washio is...”

When he heard that story, Goubayashi firstly closed his eyes and then offered a silent prayer. What kind of deep emotions were conflicting behind that expression? It was something that couldn't be understood just by looking from outside.

For the class that were moping around because of Washio's dead, the news that Goubayashi had returned was completely a good news. There was also the fact that the news was proclaimed by Nekomiya and Kaminari with a little dramatization about his activity on the deck, and the result was that the fear of death inside some of the students' hearts were considerably suppressed. Several students came to see the information exchange with Goubayashi that was being held in the dining room.

This side had mountains of things they had to report to Goubayashi. Not just Washio's death, but also about the kidnapping of Kogane, the contact with humans. The thought that the class was harboring, how they started to move, and then being shaken.

Goubayashi who was listening to the story seriously, only interposed when it came to the matter of the red winged devil.

Goubayashi said that he and Kaoruko had battled against a monster called Red Wing several times and they were chasing after it. And as the story progressed, they came to the conclusion that the monster called Red Wing seemed to be a Pawn of Blood of Red Moon.

That guy was no more than a mere Pawn, and the appearances of a Knight and a Bishop were also confirmed, finally, when the story reached the point where Washio was killed by the aforementioned Bishop, as expected, even Goubayashi would opened his eyes wide in shock.

So, speaking of the classmates' concern, it was about Kaoruko. What on earth happened to Kaoruko who should be traveling together with Goubayashi?

“Rather than getting separated, I let her escape during the battle with Red Wing.”

Goubayashi said that he had been inflicted a serious injury by the Pawn, then he was sheltered and received medical treatments by the human knights for about 10 days, after which he couldn't see Kaoruko anywhere.

"According to Utsurogi and Rin's story, the only one being kept captive by Red Moon is Kogane."

"She has also faced her inner self and acquired new power just like me, so she shouldn't be caught if it's just running away."

That was an overly optimistic observation, but with the current situation, it would be much better to think that way instead of lamenting based on uncertain informations.

And then Goubayashi said that he and Kaoruko had agreed beforehand on the route to take in case of separation. Kaoruko, using her Phase 2 ability to enlist monsters as allies starting with imps, should be heading east.

"That's right, Goubayashi."

Ryuzaki said so just as the first stage of the story was completed.

"Mu?"

While drinking the herbal tea that was served in a teacup, Goubayashi raised his face.

"Tomorrow, we're going to hold a funeral for Washio."

"That's important. Hold a memorial service for the deceased and say farewell. It's a necessary ceremony in order for humans to move forward."

"Goubayashi, won't you chant sutra?"

"Mu..."

Putting the empty teacup on the table, Goubayashi's facial expression became a little confused.

Goubayashi was a son of a temple. *I'm not saying I'm a young monk outside the gate, but since I made an effort in ascetic training together with my father and older brothers, I should be able to roughly chant sutra?* Thought Goubayashi.

"I can certainly recite sutra from memory to some extent..., but it may not be the same sect as Washio's."

"That's fine. I think form is important in these kinds of thing."

This is not a joke. [Notes]

Don't use the deceased to play make-believe. [Notes]

There might be people who would rebuke them for doing things in this way. However, Ryuzaki thought that a «*funeral make-believe*» is necessary.

We are humans, we may return to our world someday. In order not to forget that thought, Ryuzaki had been maintaining various forms of conducts inside the class. Things such as «*class meetings in a different world*», the name of «*heavy cruiser branch school*». And then treating Selena and Zeku as transfer students, assigning attendance numbers to them, all of these were done with that intent in mind.

Now that Washio had died, the most important thing was to send him off as «*humans*». This was for everyone in the class to accept Washio's dead and bid farewell to his soul. For that sake, he wanted to arrange the outward appearance as much as possible. [Rants]

"I see."

It was unknown how much he understood such an intension of Ryuzaki, but Goubayashi nodded with his arms crossed.

"The most necessary thing in mourning for the deceased is condolence. My sutra chanting is clumsy but if it can become an impetus for gathering condolences of the class, I shall undertake this task."

"Thank you, Goubayashi."

"Speaking of which, what is Utsurogi doing?"

Goubayashi asked after looking around and round the dining room. Naturally, the figure of Utsurogi Kyousuke wasn't there.

"That guy should have help you after I was gone. I want to thank him."

"Utsurogi now is a little..."

Ryuzaki averted his gaze a little.

He heard a little about what happened on the deck from Gofunkawahara. Kyousuke went out to the deck in order to help with the battle and tried to combine with Rin but it appeared that he couldn't do it. Starting with Washio's death, various troubles had occurred and caused Kyousuke to receive mental damage, or so it seemed to Ryuzaki, but he didn't understand it accurately.

Thinking about what to say after this, he was hesitating whether it was okay to inform his various classmates in this place. As Ryuzaki was pondering a little, Sugiura who guessed the situation clapped her hands **pan pan**, 『*yes yes, since everyone is a hindrance, let's go out—!*』, while saying so, she clear out the people.

Sighing, Goubayashi started the story again.

“Goubayashi, what do you think is Utsurogi’s character?”

“It is very similar to yours.”

Goubayashi easily said.

“As for difference, you have self-confidence while Utsurogi don’t. It looks like that to me.”

“How should I put this, most recently, when I look at Utsurogi, I become terribly anxious, or should I say...”

Kyousuke prioritizes others way too much, said Ryuzaki.

He had been feeling a sense of discomfort from Kyousuke for quite some time. Although he might have been worrying too much but Kyousuke’s individuality was too thin.

“There are people who have no individuality, there are also people who prioritize others too much. The problem Utsurogi is carrying doesn’t seem very special to me.”

“Really!”

“That’s right. Anyone would have their worries. We’re in our puberty.”

No way, I didn’t think that the word puberty would come out from Goubayashi’s mouth. Ryuzaki grandly spout out his tea and choke.

“...Did I say something strange?”

“N—no, sorry...”

“Perhaps there is a cause. Depending on that cause, even if the problem itself is nothing special, its root maybe deep. The problem is treated as serious more than it actually is and things will remain as is. Especially for the type like Utsurogi.”

Is this guy really the same age as me? This question that Ryuzaki always felt

whenever he talked to Goubayashi, once again appeared inside his mind. But even that thought was nostalgic now.

That reliable man, Goubayashi had come back. But unlike before, he didn't have any intention to put all the burdens of the class on this guy's shoulders any more. The excessive work could be done with everyone little by little. Even this guy wouldn't be able to take on all of that burden alone.

With this, the burden that Utsurogi had been carrying up until now would become one less.

Therefore, he wanted Utsurogi to show a lively figure again if it was possible. Watching Ryuzaki looking up at the ceiling, Goubayashi laughed.

“Ryuzaki, you have become bigger after all.”

For Pete's sake, even while answering such, he was honestly happy about those words.

Kyousuke wouldn't come out from his room after that. Rin dejectedly hung her head, she spread out flatly all over the floor.

“It's no good after all, Himemizu.”

“Yeah...”

Fuyo fuyo, a fireball flared up weakly and flew up to Rin's place. It was Akira.

Akira, who was still completely weakened due to seasickness, was blaming himself for the big wound Kyousuke's heart had received. While he had already noticed it 7 years ago, he could do nothing but watch as the hole in Utsurogi Kyousuke's heart was becoming bigger, and finally, the day had come when Kyousuke was hurt by it. The regret that he felt wasn't something small. In addition, Akira received as much shock because of Washio's death. Rin had told Akira of Washio's last moment. He rescued Kyousuke and Rin, apologized many times for the apathetic apology, left his last will to Kogane and finally died.

This story seemed to have gouged out Akira's heart deeply as he didn't trust Washio's speech and conduct and decidedly said that 『*his apology is merely for form's sake*』.

“Sorry, Himemizu. If only I was more dependable...”

“No, let’s not say such things to each other.”

This matter was no one’s fault. This problem was something that Kyouzuke had to face someday.

However, Rin just didn’t know how to cure his heart. That part was what that was frustrating to her.

Kyouzuke at the moment had gone into a state of complete rejection of others. If they were to call out to him, he would more or less respond, if they said they wanted him to come out, he would come out. But that attitude was strangely awkward as once the conversation stopped, he would immediately return to his room.

“Perhaps Kyouzuke cannot believe in himself.”

“Yeah. I think so too.”

Akira said. Rin also nodded.

Until then, Kyouzuke had thoroughly averted his eyes from his own problem. Yes, he had averted his eyes, that is to say, there were many chances to notice. Or possibly, he had already noticed his true feelings. But he didn’t want to think that was his own desire and continued living while firmly believing it was for the sake of others.

And then, Kyouzuke was in a situation where that was especially displayed right in front of him.

“Hino-kun, as expected, is there any relationship between Utsurogi-kun’s current character and the fire that you told me before?”

While leaving from in front of Kyouzuke’s room, Rin asked.

“Maybe. The origin of that fire was in Kyouzuke’s room. Was it a disposable lighter?”

Rin couldn’t quite understand those words immediately, and she was thinking a little.

“That, you mean Utsurogi-kun started the fire?”

“There’s no positive proof since the person himself wouldn’t say anything. It was when he was still a child. The result was that Kyouzuke lost both his parents and he alone survived, but then what kind of influence that has on Kyouzuke, I

can only guess.”

“Yeah...”

Certainly, that’s right. They could only guess.

Kyousuke had a strong feeling of rejection against others losing their lives. They could link that with the fire, but they could also think of it as an emotion originated from his own kindness and the fire wasn’t related at all.

Just that behind the fact that he was averting his eyes, he might be thinking that a common emotion such as 『*I want to be thanked*』 that people prone to have was something grotesque.

“Well, what will we do about it even if we know...”

Rin muttered a little.

“Probably, even if it helps us understand Kyousuke, it won’t be a clue on what to do about Kyousuke now.”

Akira also nodded.

“In order to get Kyousuke’s back on his feet, I feel that it is necessary to used a more different approach than up until now.”

“A more different approach?”

“Ahh. It’s vexing but I...”

As he was about to say something, 『*nuu*』, a shadow showed up from the corner of the corridor. Rin and Akira lost their words for a moment.

“Oh, ohhh.... Goubayashi-kun, it’s been a long time!”

Rin greeted that shadow before anything else.

It was Goubayashi Genshuu the Ogre, the one who suddenly returned in the middle of the battle with the Hydra some time ago, bringing along a new wind of relief to the class. Rin had also watched that battle in full from the cabin. She thought that he possessed enough power to fight evenly against the Pawn. Goubayashi, while crossing his arms and paying attention not to damage the low ceiling with his horn, nodded 『*umu*』.

“How is Utsurogi doing?”

“Ahh, yeah.... He’s depressed.”

When Rin answered him, Goubayashi simply responded with 『*is that so*』. Look like he heard the story from Ryuzaki.

“Nee, Goubayashi-kun.”

Suddenly recalling something, Rin asked Goubayashi.

“Mu?”

“Goubayashi-kun, how did you settle your own problem in the end?”

From what she had heard, Goubayashi should have left the class in order to confront the existence of the «*demon*» living within himself. Within the class, he was probably the student who started confronting the problem within himself the earliest and most earnestly. And then he was able to awaken to Phase 2 ability in the middle of questioning himself and fully displayed that power.

It doesn't mean that Rin had any conclusive evidence on whether or not the ability awakening really has any cause-and-effect relationship with the problem within themselves. But Kyouzuke, who confronted his own problem and had his heart withered before it, became unable to combine with Rin. So she wanted to get a hint on how to get Kyouzuke back on his feet from Goubayashi's words.

Goubayashi's answer however, was outside of her expectation.

“I haven't settled it or anything.”

“Eh...?”

“Almost everyday, I questioned myself, thinking of what I should do in order to erase the «*demon*» within my mind. But in the end, answer won't come no matter how much I think about it. If I must say, the conclusion I got is only one.”

Both Rin and Akira didn't speak a single word and just waited for Goubayashi's next words.

“I have to accept it. No matter how much I cleanse my body, no matter how much I sharpen my mind, the «*demon*» still exists within myself, so I got no choice other than getting along with it.”

Well yes, Goubayashi, who wandered for a month, said that this was the conclusion he got.

“Of course, there maybe other ways. But I have chosen this path.”

“Yeah...”

“Was it helpful?”

“I wonder about that?”

Earlier than Rin, Akira answered Goubayashi’s question.

“It is difficult for Kyouzuke to accept his own heart now. But it was a method that I haven’t tried up until now, so possibly, it maybe a correct answer.”

That said, Akira added one thing in the end, 『*this is vexing though*』.
Have Kyouzuke accept it. His own heart. His true intention. I wonder if something like that is really possible? Even if Kyouzuke accepts it, can he really change? At the end of the day, Kyouzuke facing his inner self is no more than mending the cracks in the cup.

Even if the cracks are fixed, the empty container remains empty.

“If it’s you, you can do it, Himemizu. This is impossible for me.”

Next to Rin who was troubled, Akira said.

“While changing shape flexibly according to the container, its essence never changes. The only thing that can fill an empty container is water.”

The next day, Washio Kouta’s funeral was held. Just as Ryuzaki had said, various things were prepared for outward appearance.

An impromptu Buddhist altar as well as a portrait of the deceased Washio when he was alive, which was painted by Kahara who had reincarnated as a garei (famed Japanese youkai that possesses paintings), were prepared. The portrait painted by Kahara wasn’t realistic at all, if anything, it was something that should be called an «*illustration*» instead, but still, when the classmates looked at the portrait that captured well Washio’s characteristics, it reminded them of him from old times. Harao even said that he would offer his coffin but it was politely declined.

When Goubayashi was chanting sutra, students who could sit in [seiza](#) sat in seiza, students who couldn’t do that also closed their eyes and offered a silent prayer.

Putting everything together and it became a surreal sight. However, everyone present attended Washio’s funeral with a serious expression. Even those who were completely uncooperative in normal circumstances such as Akai, Inugami

and Harao also attended, they closed their eyes and prayed for the deceased's happiness in his next life. It was regretful that only his remains wasn't here.

After the process of the funeral service ended, Goubayashi stood up, turning around to look at everyone in the class. He moved only slightly as if he didn't want to turn his back to the deceased.

"Washio's soul will go to sleep with this. He will rise to heaven over the long years and join the ranks of buddhas. We too will eventually die and follow the same journey as Washio to the afterlife. At that time, he will be our senpai. We must live wisely to our best effort so that we won't be ashamed of ourselves."

This was a so-called preaching. Many students didn't understand immediately because some semi-religious story was mixed in.

Goubayashi was reluctant to preach and said that 『*I'm not a monk and I'm still in training*』, even so, he eventually agreed to it. *Form is important*, he could understand well those words said by Ryuzaki, and he certainly felt that it was something necessary in order to softly come to terms with the shocking event called 『*death of a classmate*』.

I should take care so that it doesn't stink of religious as much as possible.

"From time immemorial, death is a very close and natural thing. We civilized people have been living by keeping away from it. But death is by no means anything special. It is next to everyone."

Some students trembled slightly when hearing those words.

"It is natural, but this ceremony called funeral is to clearly recognize that dreadful death and sending out the deceased. It is important to mourn the death, it is important to grieve. But we should send out Washio. Holding on to his life more than necessary will just tie his soul to this world, and that isn't good for Washio."

With these words, Goubayashi once again recognized that the thing called 『*funeral*』 is a ceremony made for the sake of the living instead of the dead. *Washio is dead. The dead doesn't speak. Precisely because they don't speak that those who are left behind think about various things. They will forget Washio's death, they will joke and laugh, to the point that it could be considered as insincere. But that is necessary for those who are still alive to move on.*

The dead doesn't speak. They don't think anything. They don't resent the living, they don't blame insincerity. Wrapping that kind of rational thought with human emotions and think that 『forget』 is surely for the dead. This ceremony is for that.

“Washio was a frivolous person. Well, seeing as we will gradually stop talking about him, he may think something along the lines 『don't do that』. However, as humans continue living, we will gradually stop talking about him. Even so, we shouldn't forget. We won't bother talking about a friend we haven't met in ten years. Even so, we will occasionally remember him, and we will also talk if we ever meet again. That's fine. The day when we reunite with Washio will eventually come. It maybe 60 years later, 70 years later, or possibly far far ahead in the future, but it is no more than that.”

The deck that was turned into the funeral hall fell silent.

“I'm done. Ryuzaki.”

“Ahh.”

When Goubayashi called out to him, Ryuzaki bowed to Washio's altar, stood in the same place as Goubayashi and turned toward his classmates.

“We're going to have lunch in the dining room after this. Before that, I have one thing to say. It's about Kogane.”

A slight tension ran between his classmates.

It was because the name of Kogane Yoshiki was treated as another taboo after Washio's death. It was plainly clear from the enemy's words that Kogane had gone to the enemy side. Granted that there was some unavoidable circumstances, but then Washio had already died, so suddenly an atmosphere was brewing where it was difficult to accept that guy.

“I heard Washio's last words from Rin. It seems that he wants to tell Kogane that 『I don't mind it』. I think everyone will have complicated thoughts and it will take time to accept, but I want to consider Washio's last wish.”

No words came up from the class on that matter. Ryuzaki breathed a sigh.

“Well, that's all. Then, let's move to the dining room after this...”

“Ryuzaki,”

Interrupting his words, one student inside the class tensely raise her hand. And as that student was way too unexpected, Ryuzaki stared in wonder.

“...Asuka?”

The Queen of the class, Akai Asuka the Vampire. The usual lazy appearance had completely disappeared from her expression.

“I also have something to say to everyone, but, is it okay?”

Chapter 38: Surarin, Do Your Best

The students joined up with the reincarnated ogre and repelled the Valley Hydra. This situation was disappointing.

Knight Suou, while roughly scratching his head, sat down on the sofa. Recently here, Akeno had been impulsive like that so he was acting as a pseudo-BRAIN, but there was a limit to putting on airs like a staff officer. He was after all a yankee with low academic score.

Nonetheless, that wouldn't be a reason for him not to do his best. Before a directive came down from the King, there was no choice but to do everything possible by themselves.

The 2nd year class 4's land warship was passing straight through the valley, aiming at the ruin of this kingdom. Their arrival was only a matter of time, he thought.

With the present situation, what Suou and Akeno should do was to reconcile with the students who had transform into monsters by passing through the Transference Denaturation Gate.

Originally, the Queen was supposed to gather the class at the Promised Cemetery and join up with this side over here, but then her betrayal was almost a settled matter. Although Kogane Yoshiki had already been won over as an ally but aside from that, everything was completely unknown.

About the reconciliation, the number one bottleneck was the fact that Akeno killed the Gryphon. This, he had yet to talk to Kogane.

"Suou-sama, we have captured the Valley Hydra as your command."

One of the Pawn came and reported that.

"Ahh, I have put you through trouble."

Since it couldn't do its part as a watchdog as expected, there was no longer any reason to leave it uncontrolled. It had been decided that this old would be abandoned sooner or later. In that case, they should quickly caught it and have that girl Akeno tamper with it. With the present situation where he couldn't take in the reincarnated monsters as war potential, there was no choices but to

compensate by other means. Fortunately, it ended without taking much efforts in order to capture the hydra that was beaten up to the point of having only one head left.

Thereupon, Suou noticed the line of sight of the Pawn who remained on the spot without withdrawing.

That guy was grinning disgustingly while looking at Suou.

“...What?”

This Pawn was a newcomer. Nonetheless, it had already been one and a half month since he joined.

“No, Akai-sama betrayed us after all, and...”

The Pawn’s gesture of caressing his awfully flabby chin wasn’t something very pleasant to look at.

The Pawns’ common equipment, the black armor was something carefully made by Akeno. It compensated for the weak defensive power, allowed the usage of black energy and gave physical ability. Since it was a made-to-order item to match with the physique of each Pawn, it fitted them perfectly. Whether this middle aged Pawn was living a very unhealthy life on earth, his black armor’s size was considerably misshapen.

“You, did you know? I think it was at the Queen’s school trip. Did you talk about something?”

“No, not at all. Because I am faithful a Pawn, I just fulfilled my mission. I couldn’t simply talk with Akai-sama...”

It’s fine then, said Suou, he lay down on the sofa and looked up at the ceiling.

“That Queen who was loyal to the King, betrayed...”

“I wonder if she was really loyal. Even if she has rebellious thoughts in her heart, it is difficult to oppose the King because of his power.”

“Well, that’s right.”

Suou similarly didn’t adore the King from the bottom of his heart. Just that as part of the household, the power of the King was absolute to him. He was bound by constraints of blood that could never be resisted. So he was here at this moment. There was also other reason beside that though.

“Come to think of it, what’s Akeno doing?”

“With the first stage of maintenance of the chimera completed, she is currently tampering with her own head.”

“Ahh.... It was pretty bad...”

If the situation worsened that much, she should have let them go a little earlier. Because every-time the re-maintenance of the cranial nerves system was repeated, it would become frayed somewhere so she didn’t want to do it too much. Still, once she did it, she should have never killed the Gryphon.

“Well, it’s fine. You can withdraw.”

“Yes.”

The middle aged Pawn bowed with a courteous attitude and left the hall. As if to change place with him, Kogane entered. The moment Kogane passed by the Pawn, he lightly bowed and stood still as he was, seeing off that back for a short while.

“Yo, Kogane. What’s wrong?”

“No, that person resembles the bus driver-san at the school trip...”

“It’s your imagination. I mean, you don’t remember him very well.”

Suou started doing something like sit-ups on the sofa.

“But that toad-like smile.... I remember talking with Utsurogi saying that he looks like a corrupt noble appeared in ero manga. The guys that seem to buy elves and make them slaves.”

“You read such things? Creepy otaku.”

Kogane was lightly abused, but he didn’t appear to feel hurt in particular, saying 『*no, well*』, and scratched his head.

“Hey, when are we going to see everyone in the class?”

To the words of Kogane, Suou stopped the sit-ups.

“...Please wait a bit more. Now is not a good time.”

“Is that so? I understand.”

Kogane nodded without any doubts. Yes, *now is not a good time*. However, it would be faster for this side and that side to come into contact than for it to

become a good time.

It shouldn't take more than a few days before the land warship arrived at this ruined kingdom.

"Kogane, supposing I say that everyone in the class won't take this side, what will you do?"

"Ehh, that is worrisome..."

Kogane frankly grimaced and scratched his head.

"People like Akeno-san are scary but Suou is a good guy. But Utsurogi and the others are also good guys.... I don't know what to do at that time."

That good guy may be gone the next time you meet though.

Suou swallowed the words coming up inside his mouth. In the process of accomplishing his mission as a kin, he would only be doing things that ran counter to Kogane's will. That was decided from the beginning but it still felt disgusting.

I don't know what to do at that time. That was certainly true.

Suou determinedly cleared his thoughts and restarted doing sit-ups.

"I will talk about the reason why everyone took those forms from now."

Standing in front of the class, but still taking care not to turn her back toward Washio's buddhist altar, Akai Asuka made her statement. A commotion spread among the students lining up on the deck. Ryuzaki and Goubayashi also opened their eyes wide in surprise.

Washio's funeral ended and an atmosphere of taking a break was flowing inside the class, so she also had hesitation to say such a thing.

But it was also true that there was no reason to delay the timing anymore than this.

It seemed that Inugami had already noticed, but there were always signs of Pawns who seems to be watchdogs in the surroundings of this heavy cruiser branch school. The relay station of those guy was probably close. Akai's betrayal should have also been sensed. She should talk to everyone before that.

Akai steadied her breathing. She could see Sakuma clenching her fists at her seat as if to say 『*do your best!*』.

“First of all, this transference to a different world and reincarnating as monsters isn’t an accident. What I mean is that it was orchestrated.”

Inside the commotion of the class that still didn’t settle, Akai continued.

“Next, I think there are also those who are vaguely aware of it but the ones who orchestrated that was the lot called Blood of Red Moon.”

She understood that Ryuzaki crossed his arms and nodded. Apart from him, some students also showed attitude as if they had been expecting those words. There was no figure of Utsurogi Kyouzuke in this funeral. That guy should have started noticing it too. But it wasn’t the time to worry about it at the moment.

“The blood clan is originally vampires from our world. And then———,”

Here, she paused a beat.

She intended to keep as much distance from the bunch in the class as possible. She tried not to become attached to them as much as possible.

Nevertheless, she needed some courage to say these decisive words.

“I am a comrade of those vampires.”

Instantly, the class fell deadly silent. Gazes like ice were direct at Akai.

Akai indifferently continued. The vampires who were chased out of their dwelling in the former world, formulated a plan to migrate to a different world. In the process, they started a project to transform humans to monster in order to replenish the war potential. Through some test cases, it was said that the «Queen», Akai’s classmates were chosen for the first mass transference. The project itself was started three years ago. The blood clan sent some of its kins to the high-school that Akai had entered as staff members, and they put the students that were comparatively easy to draw a «hit» in the same class as her.

At the rocky wasteland that was to be the transference destination, they established a dungeon called the Promised Cemetery. The purpose of this was to put a crack in the unity of the class by driving them in a critical situation, and then Akai herself would put them in order again, winning over the class in its entirety to the blood clan.

The fact that cookwares and household goods that became the bare minimum

living necessity were prepared in the upper part of the dungeon, that the golems holding materials and the magic reactor which can be used for various thing were arranged in the lower part, everything was to anticipate such a survival.

However, according to what could be understood from the story so far, Akai at this time continued to go against the will of the blood clan. The fact that this clear betrayal being transmitted to the King as well, was probably just a matter of time.

“What, was it as expected.”

The one who declared so inside the deadly silent class, was Ryuzaki. To him who nodded **yup yup** with his arms folded, Akai unintentionally asked back.

“———Ha?”

“I knew, Asuka. You talked a lot.”

It's a lie. Akai intuitively understood. She could understand from looking at Goubayashi's attitude behind him.

Ryuzaki too, would have been guessing to a certain extent. But as expected, things such as 『*I knew*』 shouldn't be possible. At once, Akai retorted with her usual cold attitude, 『*what are you saying?*』,... she almost did but she held her tongue.

This was Ryuzaki's consideration.

However much Akai intended to oppose the blood clan, it was an undeniable fact that she was the cause which put the class in this situation. And as a result of that, Washio had been killed. Unmistakably, anger would be directed toward Akai.

By declaring 『*I knew it all along*』 under these circumstances, Ryuzaki was implicitly saying that he forgave her.

This guy is an idiot, Akai thought. This guy is an idiot, isn't he? Goubayashi's face was saying so.

But,

“Oi, wait. I can't accept this.”

A stinging voice was heard from the direction of the students. It was Hakuba.

“Then what. Washio died because of Akai’s fault? If Akai has said something sooner, wouldn’t it end without Washio’s dying?”

“Wait Hakuba, even Asuka wouldn’t think that they would appear at that place...”

“You shut up Ryuzaki!”

Hakuba barked and turned his eyes toward Akai.

“Even I would question whether to say such a thing at the funeral. But I can’t accept this! Oi, Akai, do you have anything to say for yourself!”

“.....”

Akai closed her eyes. *I guess I will be told that*, she had that premonition. Justifications, she could make as much as she wanted. But she didn’t think she could make them understand it. It’s fine even if they wouldn’t forgive her.

Such a thing is only deception. Thinking about this class, she should beg for forgiveness even if she had to abandon her pride as the Queen.

“...I’m sorry.”

Akai politely lower her head. Her velvet hair sway like a dropped curtain.

Again, the class fell silent.

“I say, Asuka.”

A girl’s voice raised among the seats. It was one of her follower, Harui the Harpy.

“I want to ask one thing, from Akai’s viewpoint, is there a way to change back to humans and return home?”

“I cannot say it’s certain but,”

Akai raised her face.

“Because the one Utsurogi and Washio came in contact with, that is to say, Akeno is the developer of the Transference Denaturation Gate. It depends on whether or not can you get a clue regarding that, and how much that sage guy can understand it.”

“Fun. There is certainly a clue. It should be fine then.”

Harui nodded as if convinced somewhere.

Since the clue to return become more solid, let's reconcile for now, that certain atmosphere was in the process of being completed. But as Hakuba alone didn't seem to be convinced, he was intently glaring at Akai.

No, it wasn't Hakuba alone. Some of the students should be aware of the fundamental problem hidden in the content that Akai had told.

"Everyone, I think you all have something you want to say to Asuka, however."

Ryuzaki clapped his hands and said.

"Our stomach will become empty soon, so let's go have our meals for now. Since we know that Asuka isn't our enemy, and in any case, the transference to this world has already happened. So I want to think in the direction of making the best use of the information obtained from Asuka in the future."

A relieved mood flowed within the class. Everyone would hate to be on edge any further than this.

It could be summed up as swinging among the grudging feelings against Akai, the unpleasant atmosphere, and the feeling of forgiving, wavering which direction it will steer to. Except for some students, most classmates stood up as urged by Ryuzaki.

"Asuka, about «*that*», let's open a class meeting and discuss about it next time."

In the middle of starting to move to the dining room, Ryuzaki softly whispered to Akai.

"What Asuka talked about, «*the clue to return to our world*», and the «*identity of the enemy*». That's enough for now."

"Ahh, yeah..."

"There are also other worrisome matters. Like about Utsurogi."

Akai had a grim look at the mention of Utsurogi Kyouzuke's name.

Should I tell the story of Phase 2, Phase 3 to Ryuzaki? No, I also need to tell this to the whole class before long.

About Ryuzaki and Goubayashi, they should be able to instantly reach Phase 3 if she was to give them blood now. However, she didn't intend to give her blood

to her classmates anymore. To reach Phase 3 by forcibly turning them into her kins was too risky.

As long as Akai kept this policy, the one who could awaken to Phase 3 in the class, was Utsurogi Kyouusuke alone.

She would be troubled unless she got him back to his feet at any cost.

A few days after Washio's funeral. The class was regaining its peace. Everyday, many students offered their prayers to the Buddhist altar that was established for the funeral. Although the number of students who harbored distrust toward Akai wasn't just a few, but seeing her figure bowing her head toward the altar every morning without fail, they seemed to feel inclined to forgive her somewhat. Just that the ditch in Hakuba who was close to Washio still seemed to be very deep.

These past few days, Akai was looking through the memo Selena left behind while having various consultation with Ryuzaki and Sakuma. *What kind of Phase 2 ability can each student awake to?, from Akai's perspective, how many students have already awaken?* It was consultations regarding those matters.

Then,

"Himemizu, thanks for waiting."

Akai came along to the place where Rin was waiting in the dining room.

"No, I haven't waited—. I came just n—"

"It's not a date..."

Akai seemed as bored as usual, she sat down in front of Rin with a face like she heard a very uninteresting joke. Well, she did actually hear a very uninteresting joke though.

Rin unblinkingly stared at Akai's face.

"...What?"

"No, I never thought that Akai-san would return such a tsukkomi..."

"Since it's bothersome, can I start the story?"

"Ah, yes."

Ton ton, putting the documents in order, Akai said. In response to that, Rin straighten her back.

Akai, while flipping through the documents, put on the thin rim glasses that she took out from her (chest) pocket and squinted at the documents.

“Huh, Akai-san...”

“Myopia. Is it bad?”

“Despite being a vampire.... And a native one at that.”

“I can see everything if it’s dark. I read books without lighting in the middle of the night.”

Or rather, didn’t her eyes go bad because she was doing such things?

Well, it’s fine. Today, Himemizu Rin received a summons from Akai Asuka. In fact, Hino Akira was supposed to have participated as well, but he refused. When he heard that it was related to Utsurogi Kyouusuke, Akira said 『*Then it’s much better if it’s not me but Himemizu alone*』.

Rin had been entrusted with Kyouusuke by Akira. He said that 『*water will fill the vessel*』. She was glad to be trusted but somehow, it was strangely anxious without Akira here.

“First of all, about Phase 2, Himemizu has already reached it.”

“Ah, yup. It’s as expected.”

“Slime’s Phase 2 hypothetically has 5 or 6 possibilities, but Himemizu’s is probably this one.”

The document presented by Akai had 《*Liquid Control*》 properly written in Japanese. That’s it.

*Others are 《**Magic Awakening**》 or 《**Biological Power Generation**》, etc. Hey, isn’t this 《**Humanization**》 unusual? Doesn’t it feel like this one is better? I will be able to run even by myself.*

“The transformed monsters’ figure that was caused by the Transference Denaturation Gate reflects the mental scenery in the adapting person.”

“Fun fun. Everyone has vaguely noticed this too.”

That is to say, they became the figure which reflected the condition in their heart. There was also things that she couldn’t understand about some of the students, or couldn’t be convinced but it wasn’t the case that Rin could completely grasped the heart of very classmates. There would certainly be some reasons.

Rin who had a **funya funya** personality became a slime, Akira the passion house became a wisp. Goubayashi who was too conscious of the demon within himself became an ogre. Hakuba who was abnormally fixated on female virginity became a unicorn.

“Speaking of which, how about Saa-chan?”

“About Sachi? You want me to say it?”

“I’m sorry.”

Is it as expected? Rin completely thought so. *Awkward.*

“The power after Phase 2 changes depending on that figure and how properly you’re facing it, and then whether or not you can master it.... Ah, thank you.”

A little late breakfast was carried to Akai’s place. 『*Take your time*』, Sugiura who carried the meal said while waving her hand and returning to the kitchen. Akai was a vampire but unexpectedly she ate food as normal. Would it be okay if she doesn’t drink human’s blood?

“Himemizu is probably facing it properly. And then Ryuzaki and Goubayashi as well. That’s why you can use your power freely.”

“Ah—, then, the fact that Utsurogi-kun become unable to combine with me is because he cannot believe in himself anymore.”

“Yes.”

Akai nodded and picked up a long thin bread from on top of the dish.

“Utsurogi has a part that has been looking away from his own problem, right? And now that he noticed it, he is rejecting it. Of course, there is also the mental shock, but because of that combining with Himemizu is...”

Then, Akai was trying to say something but stopped. Whether the long thin bread was skillfully baked, it limply broke.

“...Did I say something strange just now?”

“Not at all. Then, what I should do after this is helping Utsurogi-kun regain his self-confidence and get him back on his feet, isn’t it?”

“Himemizu also noticed, didn’t you?”

It is important to solve the problem of the heart, Akai said. However, as a major premise in the first place, Kyousuke had refused his own problem. He was

denying a part of his of my humanity. It could be said to be quite a troublesome problem.

Kyousuke didn't participate in Washio's funeral. It was because his heart had entered defensive mode. It seemed that he had to endure quite a lot when he couldn't combine at the most important timing.

"Solving the problem, and become able to completely draw out the your power, is the preliminary step to Phase 3."

Purposely not putting her hands on the funyafunya bread, Akai said so.

"Then, by receiving the blood of the blood clan, you can awaken to Phase 3."
"Ah, that's right. Then, once Utsurogi-kun solves his problem, he will power up more."

"More or less."

Akai's words had a strange implication. She had said it before, the story of 『*good side effect*』 and 『*bad side effect*』. From the fact that Akai hesitated to present her blood and that Akai herself was perpetrating the betrayal to her own blood clan, that «*demerit*» could be guessed to a certain extent. There was no intention to make her said it out loud.

It was a fact that Kyousuke was saved thanks to Akai's blood.

"Then what is Himemizu going to do? Does it look like you can manage Utsurogi somehow?"

"U-n. What do I do? I'm getting hints from Hino-kun and Goubayashi-kun."

Flattening her whole body, stretching it, Rin replied.

"Akai-san, can you not give more hints than this?"

"I don't want to put out on the emotional basis. Because I'm on Sachi's side."

"Ahh, yeah.... Is that so..."

"But I think what Himemizu is trying to do is the correct answer."

Akai said so and leaned her back on the chair. She brought the teacup containing herbal tea to her mouth.

That moment, the heavy cruiser branch school suddenly stopped. The herbal tea inside the cup that was about to fly around violently was kept in check by Akai's black energy. In contrast to Rin who was thrown off from her seat, Akai

didn't even shake, as though she was detached from space itself.

So this is the power of the Queen. She said she wouldn't participate in battle as much as possible in order to not let the King find out her location, but it seemed that using just this amount strength was fine.

『Ah—, *this is Gofunkawahara!*』

The broadcast echoed inside the ship, so Rin and Akai looked up.

“Sorry. Combat personnel who can move please come out. The hydra came again! 5 heads are already regenerating and it stays on the route of the branch school, so I want to repel it!”

In this mountainous area, the direction of travel that could be taken was limited. It was difficult to compete with the Blood of Red Moon head-on at the moment, so securing a path was a top priority. If they got careless, the Pawn and Knight attacking again might very well be happening.

Akai put down the herbal tea cup with a grim face. Certainly, if she joined, the problem would be settled quickly.

“What is Himemizu going to do?”

“I'm going to call out to Utsurogi-kun.”

To Rin who tried to leave the dining room while crawling, Akai smiled slightly.

“Good luck.”

“Yup, thank you!”

When she arrived at Kyouzuke room, it was exactly then that he opened the door and was about to come out.

Kyouzuke suddenly raised his face and turned his line of sight toward Rin. That intended line of sight was diverted a little, but then Kyouzuke turned it back to Rin again.

“Himemizu...”

“Yo, Utsurogi-kun!”

Pyonkon, extending her body, Rin greeted.

“Are you going to the deck?”

“Ahh.... Since I just can't seem to stay still...”

Kyousuke's voice had no ambition. So unreliable that he seemed to collapse if you just slightly nudge him.

In the end, Rin's relationship with him was less than two month at most, so she couldn't understand what Kyousuke was thinking. All the more so since a skeleton has no expression. It was still easy to understand if he received a shock and completely shut himself away in his own shell, rejecting others, but he also didn't show such appearance at the moment.

Kyousuke advanced through the corridor, 2 steps, 3 steps, and then stood still again.

"You're not going to go after all?"

Rin tried to make a bright voice and asked.

"The outside is cold after all. I guess this is also good."

"....."

Kyousuke suspended and stopped moving like he was paralyzed.

I just can't seem to stay still. But even if I go, what can I do? I don't know. Was that what he was thinking?

Kyousuke who was trying to avert his eyes from his inner self was trying to compensate for his feelings by acting for the sake of others at least. But acting for the sake of others was originated from his our ego after all so Kyousuke couldn't accept that. Therefore, he couldn't move.

"Ne—, Utsurogi-kun, let's combine with me."

While looking at Kyousuke's back, Rin said. Beyond his ribs, the scenery on the other side could be seen through.

"...I cannot do it, just the other day."

"Well, the other day is already the other day. I'm telling you I want to do it, so let's combine?"

In the end, no matter how depressed Kyousuke was, he couldn't refuse other people's request. This was his good point and at the same time his bad point. It was the part that became his support and also his hollow part. Even if he hated himself for «*pretending to act for the sake of others*», he couldn't refuse others. Rin at the moment, was trying to use that naivety of his to forcibly push her way

through his shield.

A little evil, she thought, but there was no choice but to do it.

“.....”

Kyousuke showed a positive attitude within silence. Rin crawled to his feet and touched that his bones.

There was no feeling of strength welling up, and neither the sense that Kyousuke's heart was being transmitted directly. It felt completely like a stone-made stick, dull and uninteresting feel. After all, Kyousuke's Phase 2 ability had completely died.

“All...”

Nevertheless, Rin tried to coil around Kyousuke's body and constructed a body. Making Kyousuke's skeleton as the core, she imitated a human shape. Meanwhile, Kyousuke didn't move at all.

“All ... all right, per ... fectt...!”

“Himemizu...”

“Utsurogi-kun...! You can do it, combine...!”

This, was only Rin forcibly mimicking a human form using Kyousuke's body as a prop. Without receiving the benefit of Phase 2 ability 《*Characteristics Amplification*》, Rin couldn't fixed her body as Kyousuke's flesh. Her body was heavy with an unfamiliar posture. The surface of the whole body couldn't resist gravity, it was mushy, gelatinous liquid was dripping. The liquid that had fell to the floor, repeated feeble trembling motion and returned to Rin's body. It was unsightly and misshapen, to make the matter worse, this posture was painful. This was not the «*Cross Combine (Named by Akira)*» that could only be done because it was Kyousuke's body, this was just the figure of a slime suitably placed on top of a skeleton. Nevertheless, Rin clearly announced that 『*we can combine*』.

“Eh, ehehe.... Ne—, we can combine but, what do we do after this—?”

“.....”

Kyousuke kept silent and looked his right arm. Opened, closed. It was action that he often did in order to confirm how familiar his body felt every-time he combine. Rin's body that was sticking to Kyousuke's palm, its moment was

slow, opened, closed, repeated.

“Himemizu...”

“First of all, Utsurogi-kun..., errr. Le—let’s go to the deck!”

Surely her bluff was already exposed. Even Kyouzuke was not thickheaded to that extent.

But even if she assumed that it had already been sensed, she couldn’t afford to let him spell it out. Rin forcibly pushed the *truth* called 『*we can combine*』 to Kyouzuke. As long as she pushed hard, he wouldn’t be able to refuse.

“...I understand.”

Kyouzuke nodded and slowly walked through the corridor. Gelatinous liquid continued to drip from his whole body, his pace was slow. Rather than calling him a skeleton, it would be more suitable to call him a zombie instead.

Even if she got this close to Kyouzuke, the voice of his heart still didn’t echo. In truth, she wanted to said more skillful words. But what she could do then, was only this.

I cannot solve my problem, there was no choice but to face it, said Goubayashi.

What can fill the empty container is only water, said Akira.

What Kyouzuke was thinking, she didn’t know. But what she could do, was only this.

Until the container that had become empty was filled, she would absolutely never let go of this body. Rin was prepared for it.

Chapter 39: Branch School Assault

The land warship of 2nd year class 4 finally marched into the remains of the royal capital. Those guys didn't know Suou, Kogane and the others were in this abandoned castle. If they mutually stayed silent, there would be no need to come into conflict. If that was at all possible, Suou would like to take that course.

According to the reports he got from the Pawns who went out for reconnaissance, those guys, even after the experience of having of their friends died, had no atmosphere saying that they would scatter any time soon. Perhaps there was a leader with high unifying power. Probably that dragonoid he heard from Kogane.

The order came down from the King was absolute. He had to continue exerting his best efforts in order to lure those guys over as friends.

Originally, he wanted to shake those guys up, make the cooperation foundation rattle, accumulate stress and drive them into a critical situation, but that situation didn't come true.

Or better yet, should I apologize and show the sincerity of this side? Apologize for killing the gryphon, explain the situation and have them become friends? Well, it's impossible. It's a different matter if there is a proper just cause, but what we're doing here is simply an invasion war on another world. There is no reason to obey.

How about dangling a bait of the mean to return to their world? This too isn't something I can rely on. Starting with the Transference Denaturation Gate, all technologies were developed by Akeno, the one who directly sent the gryphon on his way. It is difficult to wipe out the distrust toward her.

"Suou."

Kogane came along to the reception hall.

"What's wrong? Today we haven't played Tekken together."

"My bad, there's a little errand."

"Ah—, is it fighting again? It was also serious for Suou. Shall I also help?"

“No...”

Suou glanced outside the window a little. After this royal capital was destroyed several hundreds years ago, it was left to ruin, trees were growing everywhere and it became like a forest. That land warship should be somewhere in the back of the trees and the group of buildings.

“I think this every-time, but this place seems like Angkor Wat, isn’t it?”

Kogane muttered. *Was it a World Heritage of Thailand? There was that kind of things too.*

After all, Suou couldn’t tell Kogane about that matter. And the thing about the gryphon too. But even if he kept silent about it, it would eventually leak out someday.

In the end, Suou was not skillful enough to fulfill his mission as a blood kin while respecting Kogane’s feelings.

“Kogane, actually, those guys are coming.”

Hearing that, Kogane’s eyes turned round.

“Utsurogi and the others?”

“Just that, those guys now are on the Queen side and won’t listen to this side’s story.”

“Akai? Akai betrayed Suou’s side after all?”

“That’s right. Therefore, disperse the class, Kogane on one side, I on the other and persuade them. I will also use a somewhat rough method, please forgive that.”

To Suou’s words, Kogane pondered with a difficult face. It wasn’t the case that he had taught Kogane all the truth. If anything, all he said was just a sentimental story of fellows people from the same world should join hands together. So it’s not something to wonder about even if Kogane became able to judge the situation calmly and began to question Suou’s actions.

In that case, it was possible for Suou group to forcibly give him «*blood*» and make him listen to what they say.

Forced obedience method by mean of giving «*blood*» and turn him into his kin. Honestly speaking, he didn't want to use that too much.

“All right. I'll help.”

Finally, Kogane nodded without any doubt whatsoever.

“Akeno-san is?”

“That girl Akeno has a headache so she's resting.”

This wasn't a lie. She slept for several days after the readjustment finished. It was about time she got up though.

“For now, I'm going to take out the hydra and lure out the main force of those guys. Kogane is responsible for that side.”

“All right. If it's the main force, Ryuzaki and Utsurogi is there so I think it will be easy to talk.”

“...And then, those guys too, may try to shake Kogane up in order to bring you back.”

There was something quite painful when he spoke of this random speech.

“Shake up?”

“As told by the Queen, they may tell you a lie in order to shake you up.”

“...Is there any value to go that far to bring back this me?”

Kogane smiled a self-torturing smile.

The war potential value of Kogane who wake up to Phase 2 was quite something. But what he wanted to say wasn't about that. It would be because he couldn't recall any reason to do such an elaborate trick just to bring back him who committed many violence and hated actions within the class.

“Well, if you're told a lie, you should think that you have that much value.”

Seeing that he couldn't recognize the definite truth that «*the gryphon was dead*», it would be next to impossible for Kogane to persuade those guys. Suou didn't have any expectation regarding that in the first place. Kogane's role was to nailed down the main force and fixed them in place.

After luring out the main force's battle units, Suou could come out with the 『*rough method*』. That was the destruction of the enemy's mean of movement, the land warship. He would also bring the chimera developed by Akeno. And in

the case he could take some of them back, then it would be even better.

Judging from the Queen's personality, she would remain in the moving base. So the fight with Suou was unavoidable, but since she was afraid of being sensed by the King, she wouldn't be able to fight with her full strength. From the Kogane's information, he knew that the Queen had close friends within the schoolgirls. He could not even imagine how that cool-headed Queen would let down her guard to anyone beside the King, but if it was true, could be used well enough. If he could use that student skillfully, he would be able to seal the Queen's movement.

Once this battle was over, it would become difficult for Suou to keep the friendship with Kogane as before. Kogane would know about the gryphon's death in the process of trying to persuade the main force, and he would try to question Suou about that.

If that happened, it would finally end there. He would have no choices but to discard any unnecessary sentiment and make Kogane into his kin.

"In the end, I too am just a brute that has no right to speak about people."

"Did you say something? Suou."

"It's nothing. Let's play Tekken once we're done."

"Yup. It would be nice if we can do it together with Utsurogi and everyone."

Well, that future probably won't come true.

He gave out instructions to the remaining Pawns to bring out the hydra and chimera. If possible, he wanted to finish things before Akeno woke up. It was because Suou himself didn't know what kind of character she would become when she woke up after finishing her readjustment.

Suou and Kogane finished their preparation after a little more than 10 minutes and departed from the old castle.

The heavy cruiser branch school got out from the valley and went into a somewhat large forest. The surroundings were covered with castle walls-like something, and historic ruins that appeared to be man-made buildings could be seen here and there, but whether the human hands hadn't touched this place for a long time, trees were growing up everywhere.

It was the ruins of a country that had once existed in this vicinity and were

destroyed hundreds of years ago. Stop going south at this place, and turn the route toward the East. In doing so, they would come out to the sea before long.

But then, the hydra that attacked the branch school a few days ago appeared here, so a countermeasure party had been organized immediately.

It was an elite unit with excellent combat personnel generously incorporated, starting from Ryuzaki and Goubayashi. For recovery personnel, Nekomiya had been chosen, and even more surprising, Akai and Harao had also announced their candidacy. When these two people got on the deck, Ryuzaki was utterly confused, however,

『I cannot use my full power because of certain circumstances. But I will show my sincerity.』

『I has't to grant the curse of Harao to the one who disturb mine friends' slumber.』

So he was told.

It was already an hour ago that the elite unit left the heavy cruiser branch school. In the meantime, the protection of the heavy cruiser was left to Gofunkawahara leading the goblins and Sakuma. As contact personnel, the thunderbird Kaminari and the unicorn Hakuba was on standby.

Kyousuke too, remained on the branch school as a combat member, patrolling on the deck. Every-time he walked, Rin's body that stuck to him dripped dropped on to the floor.

"Himemizu, isn't it painful...?"

"Fu, Fuuuu.... Eh, eeeh? Whaatt?"

While Rin was holding out, he knew that she was desperately trying to maintain her shape.

Kyousuke's Phase 2 ability, *《Characteristics Amplification》* wasn't in invocation right then, and Rin couldn't use Kyousuke's body as support to maintain a human form. Rin's current state, was similar to standing on tiptoe, or possibly seating on an air chair, it was something essentially unreasonable on anatomical basis.

Kyousuke and Rin had not combined. This form was merely a pretense of combining. Rin's body drip-dropping from her whole body was the proof of

that.

*The value for her to push herself this far, I have not.
Why is she doing this much, I don't understand.*

Utsurogi Kyouusuke was completely empty. That had always been the case since that day. At least he thought that he had to become a splendid person who would be appreciated by people, hence he had repeated great effort for that sake. The hypocrisy accumulated on the surface only and had never accompanied with contents. In retrospect, what he was, was just a good-for-nothing made of filth.

No matter what he tried, something would still be missing, a shallow man. That was Utsurogi Kyouusuke. Even though he should have noticed it a long time ago, he kept averting his eyes away so that he wouldn't even look at it. At least, he felt that he wouldn't be able to maintain himself unless he kept on living while pretending to be human.

"You're overthinkinggg..."

Kyouusuke trembled a bit at Rin's words.

"Hi-Himemizu.... Just now, my heart was..."

"Nhaha. Since you fell into silent and was in a daze somehow, I just thought that you was thinking about something difficult again."

Rin said in an awfully bright tone.

"I'm not as good as Hino-kun, but it's true that I came to understand various things. Various things about Utsurogi-kun."

Why would you worry about me even though you understand that much?

"I hate myself..."

Kyouusuke muttered a bit. Putting his hands on the handrail of the deck, he gazed at the former townscape of the royal capital that was currently covered in a forest.

He wasn't aware of it so far, but he finally understood. Kyouusuke hated his inner self. He hated himself who was an ugly half-baked existence, his empty, shallow self that had failed to become a splendid person in the end.

“Reaally.”

Rin said.

“I like you though.”

“.....”

“Not just me. I think that Hino-kun, Saa-chan, and everyone quite like Utsurogi-kun though.”

He knew. There were good guys who liked this kind of him. Nevertheless, Kyouusuke couldn't come to like himself.

Every-time he was told gentle words, Kyouusuke felt depressed.

“You two, what are you doing there?”

“Gya—! It's the public moral committteeee!!”

Rin shouted with all her heart because of the sudden voice.

“?”

And turning his line of sight, as she said, the headless public morals committee member Kensaki Megumi stood there while holding her own head and inclining it in an exquisite angle. Rin almost fell from Kyouusuke body because of the too strong impact but she desperately clung to him and endured somehow.

“We, we're not doing anything! We don't have any guilt that the public morals committee should get angry at for!”

“Really? It's fine in that case then. Rather than that, is Utsurogi already okay?”

Asked by Kensaki, Utsurogi was lost about how to answer. He was by no means okay. But was it really good to give that kind of answer?

“There's no problem if it seems to still take a little while. Well, you didn't show up at Washio's funeral so Sakuma and Hino are also worried.”

“.....”

Kyouusuke was silent. Kyouusuke didn't appear at Washio's funeral, and he had yet to offer any prayers or incense sticks to his altar.

When Washio died, when Kogane was kidnapped, Kyouusuke couldn't do a single thing in the end. The tormenting feelings inside became even stronger.

“...Sorry if I said too much.”

“...No.”

Did it show in his attitude? Looking at Kensaki carefully apologized to him, he started to feel like running away even more.

When Kyouzuke tried to move his eyes toward the townscape of the ruins of the former royal capital, a siren suddenly reverberated in the heavy cruiser branch school. Kensaki quickly looked back. As she turned around and directed her head, it was completely a familiar action as a dullahan.

The words of Gofunkawahara echoed as far as the deck through the ship broadcasting.

『Confirmed enemy getting closer from starboard! Those who can fight get on the deck! Kaminari and Hakuba go call Ryuzaki and the others!』

Kensaki's face stiffen and she started running toward the right side of the ship. Other students too, seemed to be coming out one after another. Kyouzuke tried to move but stopped still. *What can I do? Won't he just hinder everyone again?*

“Let's go, Utsurogi-kun.”

Rin said clearly.

“...All right.”

Kyouzuke also nodded. As they were trying to start moving, an impact hit the right side of the branch school and the hull greatly shook.

Sakuma Sachiko put down the documents that she was looking through and jumped out of her room. When she got to the deck, the heavy cruiser branch school shook together with a thunderous roar. She put her hands on the walls to adjust her posture and stepped on toward the right side.

The hull was scraped and gouged out greatly. There were already students gathered such as Kensaki and Kagoi. Ahead of their line of sight, at the place that appeared to be the center of the impact stood a boy. That guy turned around like threatening the surroundings while both his hands were thrust in his pockets. In terms of age, he looked to be around the same age as themselves. Moreover, he was a Japanese based on his appearance.

But that fact didn't dispel Sakuma and the others' tension, it was actually strengthened much further instead.

Black stand-up collar school uniform. Swept back black hair that was smooth down, a pair of blood red eyes. There was no doubt, this guy was a vampire. One of the blood clan that Akai Asuka was the Queen of. Sakuma clenched her fists tightly. She had heard some information about the blood clan from Akai and Inugami. In this world, a blood kin that didn't wear a black armor was a «*named*» piece, that is to say, pieces such as Knight or Bishop. Not a Pawn.

"Ouou."

The boy raised the corner of his mouth while pushing his hands into his pockets. As is, he squinted and looked around at the surroundings once more.

"A warm welcome, isn't it? Queen ... isn't here. It's surprising."

"What did you come here for?"

Kensaki set up her sword and asked with a sharp voice.

"Don't get so angry. It's not like you're a public morals committee member."

"I'm a public morals committee member."

"Ah, really.... Then you're the type I'm weak against."

The boy didn't appear to falter even if sharp words and hostility were directed at him. He took out his hands from his pockets, corrected the collar of his gakuran.

"I'm Suou. Suou the Knight."

Sakuma recalled the documents that Akai had prepared.

Suou the Knight. He should have been a high-school student going to Kanazawa technical high school. Since there was mostly no contact with Akai, his disposition wasn't mentioned but it was said that he had a brute force fighting style using physical ability appropriate for a Knight.

There members here were students who would be helpless against even a Pawn. Even if such a bunch gathered together, could they win against this boy who bore the title of Knight. Tension ran.

"Oi oi, don't be so stiff. Not like I especially came here to pick a fight."

“Even if you have no reason to fight, we do. Our classmate was killed.”

“...Well, I guess so.”

Finally breaking his smile, Knight Suou said so. Excessive provocation shouldn't be done. But that they could not readily comply with the words of their opponent, was the truth.

“It's fine. Since there's no Queen anyway, I'll quickly advance my work and...”

“GUOUOOOOU!!”

“Nn...!?”

A wolf with silver white hair ran straight through the deck and spring at Knight Suou.

“Inugami-san!”

Sakuma shouted. Suou bent his body slightly and dodged Inugami's body came plunging in like a bullet.

“Ahh, really. Was there a survivor of the dogs...”

After clicking his tongue like it was troublesome, Suou glared at Inugami. Inugami bared her fangs and threatened Suou.

“Inugami-san, don't unreasonably go alone!”

In response to Sakuma's words, Inugami clicked her tongue a little and ran to Sakuma's place like flying.

“Well, that's wise. You cannot win by yourself.”

Saying so, Suou started to move. He completely didn't mind the sword-tip being directed at him by Kensaki.

“I don't think you can win even with everyone though.”

“This...!”

Kensaki stepped in sharply and swung her sword. But Suou's arm moved faster than the blade could touch his body. A clenched fist slammed against her armor and her body was easily blown away together with an impact. Completely like ball game or something, Kensaki's body was thrown into the air, as it was, she fell on the deck and started rolling.

“Gaa ... guaa...!”

“Kensaki-san!”

This time, Suou aimed his line of sight toward Sakuma who shouted.

“Succubus? You’re friend of Queen.”

“.....!”

Words with hidden implication. Sakuma wasn’t stupid enough to not understand. Slightly faltering, she took 2 steps, 3 steps back. Inugami, while standing in front of Sakuma, strengthen her growl.

As Suou was slowly approaching, Kensaki used her sword in place of a cane and tried to stand up. She raised a loud voice as if to confirm the vague guess of everyone in this place.

“That guy’s aim is Sakuma! Protect Sakuma!”

“Leave it to me...!”

Most prided for their strength, Kagoi and Okumura, as well as Zeku threw themselves at Suou without any hesitation. A little later after them, Uozumi also followed.

“Ouou, you guys are getting along well!”

Suou, first and foremost, used his left arm to suppress Kagoi who was trying to restrain him with a tackle, then counter attacked by driving a back-fist into Okumura’s face. Although it looked like he was only lightly bumped with a fist, Okumura’s gigantic body was greatly thrown back and slammed against the deck.

As other students was gulping, Zeku brandished his fist and attacked Suou. However, Suou threw Kagoi’s body at Zeku. Kagoi and Zeku tangled up together and rolled on the floor. As for Uozumi who came along a little later, Suou gifted him a yakuza kick. Uozumi gave a little scream and sunk into the wall of the cabin. The ones prided in CQC in the class were instantly scattered and the path from Suou to Sakuma was secured.

『*Sakuma, stand down!*』

Inugami who was bearing her fangs shouted.

“You think you can challenge me despite it not being a full moon? Little

puppy.”

“GUuOUu!”

Replying to the provocation with a roar, Inugami once again jumped at Suou. Shokuzura stretched his tentacles and caught Suou’s arms. The mermaid Uozumi little sister chanted attack magic of water attribute and launched a spear. Suou flicked off the ice spear, then conversely caught the tentacles and forcibly dragged Shokuzura, slamming him against Uozumi little sister. In that gap, Inugami who was jumping at Suou bit her fangs into his throat. Her fangs sunk into his nape and windpipe, blood flowed. Sakuma also tried to back her up with attack magic but Suou and Inugami were wrestling together so she couldn’t get a good aim.

Even though his neck was bitten, Suou wasn’t agitated, and he didn’t stop walking either. While Suou was slowly approaching, Sakuma glared back at him. Kaminari group was going to bring Akai back soon. So she couldn’t afford to escape this place.

Kyousuke and the others were also riding on this ship as well.

Sakuma wouldn’t be able to unravel his heart as well as Rin. In this last moment, she felt it was vexing that she couldn’t become Kyousuke’s strength or Akai’s. Nevertheless, she at least didn’t want to take the action of turning her back against the opponent before her eyes.

“Like I’ll let you—!!”

A skittish voice echoed and Harui swooped down from the sky. Simultaneously, Hebtsuka came out slithering on the deck and coiled around Suou.

“We too are Asuka’s friends, ignoring us isn’t happening!”

“Good grief, troublesome things one after another!”

Even with Inugami biting his windpipe, Harui attacking with her claws from the sky, Hebtsuka constricting his body and stabbing him with claws and fangs, Suou still didn’t shake even slightly. He simply peeled off her jaw like it was irritating and slammed her body strongly against the deck, then trampled down on her throat.

“Gyann...!”

“I won’t kill you. I also feel that it won’t get anymore complicated than this, but just in case!”

Grabbing the legs of Harui who was repeating nose diving attack countless times and using her like a weapon, he threw her at Hebetsuka.

“Uwaa!”

“Kyaa!”

At the moment those two separated from Suou, Sakuma released 《*Evil Flare*》. But Suou lightly repelled that flame with his right arm like it was a trifling matter. Suou came closer to Sakuma. Her fists were clenching tightly. She was going to give up, wasn’t what it looked like.

If she was caught here, she would trouble everyone, trouble Akai. So she wasn’t going to be obedient.

“OOO–RYAAA!”

While other classmates were still collapsed on the deck, a shadow came attacking from Suou’s flank together with a yell. Suou suddenly stopped his legs and caught that fist with his palm without looking in that direction.

“What, Utsurogi. It’s you.”

Suou spat and said so.

“I’m also here though!!”

Instead of Kyousuke not answering, Rin shouted.

Yes, the one there was Utsurogi Kyousuke. Sakuma were wide-eyed in surprise. She heard that he was still shutting himself in his room. Not just him but Rin was also together. They were in the so-called combined state, as named by Akira, 《*Stream Cross*》. In the beginning when Sakuma and Kensaki were attacked by the Wight King, it was also this figure that came attacking before anything else.

However, she couldn’t feel any joy, elation or dependability that felt at that time when he came to help. Kyousuke’s appearance was clearly different from that time.

It was too unstable a combine that it felt like they would separate if you were to so much as poking them. Since it could be understood even from Sakuma's point of view, it might actually be more serious than that. From the whole body, Rin's body was drip-dropping like being melt, and the blow just now as well didn't seem to have that much power loaded in it.

"Utsurogi-kun..."

Sakuma timidly called out to him.

"....."

Kyousuke glanced back at Sakuma and then returned his gaze to the front. His heart had yet to recover. Sakuma tried to think if there was anything she could do, but as expected, nothing came to mind. The one closest to him now wasn't her.

"Himemizu-san, please take care of Utsurogi-kun."

"Yup, leave it to me."

Rin nodded clearly to Sakuma's words. Kyousuke still glared at Suou and took a frail stance.

Meanwhile, other collapsed students also slowly stood up. Damage still remained, but they were treated by Uozumi little sister's *《Vento Arcobaleno》*. The will to fight still remained in everyone present.

Suou confirmed that appearance and sighed greatly.

"Well now. Do I use it?"

The meaning of those words, the people present here couldn't understand. But the moment Suou raised his hand, a big shadow blocked the little sunlight that were peeking through the clouds, fell on the deck.

"Come, chimera."

Together with his words, a huge body of about 5 meters in total length with a corresponding weight landed on the deck, and the hull shook greatly again.

Chapter 40: Want to Be One

“The hydra should be ahead.”

Said Ryuzaki while advancing by parting the bushes.

Crumbled buildings were scattering here and there. Plants, including trees, were growing, breaking through floorboards and walls that seemed likely to be stone, making one felt the essential strength of life. Occasionally they caught sight of big bugs or snakes, but students who would raise a cute scream didn't exist among these 5.

“However, Harao really came.”

Looking at Harao the Pharaoh walking silently, Nekomiya muttered. Pharaoh, speaking of Pharaoh, it is an embalmed monster, the so-called mummy. His whole body was cladded in luxurious ornaments, his face was covered by a golden mask, in his hands was an Egyptian cross props called ankh. Harao, from the time as humans, was a person with a lazy character and was often seen sound asleep. It was said that he even slept while walking when sightseeing the city during the school trip. Harao's popularity wasn't very good with the teachers due to his much too unserious attitude in the classroom, but with the reason that the grades of the person himself never dropped below a certain level and everyone of his relatives were either the town's celebrity or big-shot in the political economic world so there were many parts that they were complicit in.

Since Harao who was like that said it himself that he would cooperate in the hydra extermination, even others beside Nekomiya would also be surprised.

“One of mine friends hadst been guided to rest in the Nile River by the law of morning and night.... Thus I, cannot afford to keep snoring in our coffin...”

Suddenly stopping and looking up at the sky, Harao's speech and conduct was too dyed too thick a character that their understanding couldn't keep up. Akai sighed and looked at the surroundings like being bored. The sailor uniform seemed too light equipment for walking inside the forest, but the person herself didn't show any sign of caring about it.

“In other words, Harao is praying for Washio’s soul to rest peacefully.”

Goubayashi who was walking in the lead forcibly concluded with words that seem like an avid Buddhist.

“For me, it’s more surprising that Harao has that much fellowship feelings with our classmate.”

“Washio was my friend. I who was isolated in the class was taught the commoners’s ways of having fun by that man. Karaoke, bowling.... In order to repay his friendship, I have paid for everything with my money.”

“I don’t want to say this and that about the deceased, but perhaps he was just sponging off you.”

“No problem. I enjoyed it. It’s noblesse oblige.”

Although Washio was a frivolous person, but it was a completely surprising story that his connections even reached up to Harao.

“As for me, Asuka following us is more surprising though...”

Ryuzaki took a glance at Akai’s direction.

“What, is it wrong? I thought I told you. It’s to show sincerity.”

Whether she didn’t want to talk about that too much, Akai responded in a bad mood. Ryuzaki smiled bitterly.

“I don’t mean that it’s wrong or anything, but...”

“But we cannot afford to have Akai leave the branch school for too long.”

It’s as Goubayashi had said. What was required of Akai wasn’t just the role of being a combat personnel. Her presence also had the meaning of keeping in check the Blood of Red Moon’s attacks. They brought her this time since it was Akai’s wish herself, but contact personnel with fast feet was waiting on standby at the branch school just in case.

Nonetheless, this was Akai who could easily bury a Pawn even with just less than half of her power. If putting together her strength with Ryuzaki, Goubayashi and others, it wouldn’t take so long to bring down the hydra.

Gasa, making rustling sound, the bushes shook. All present stopped their feet.

The old castle that was visible from the branch school was becoming

considerably bigger. The place where they saw the hydra's appearance should be around this area, but that sound in the bushes was too small to be from the hydra. *Is it some kind of magical beast like Forest Wolf or something? This pattern is no good, there's the possibility that it is the Pawns of the blood clan or something.*

"T's a *human* child."

Pointing at the shadow in the back of the bushes, Harao said. *Are you different?* All those present swallowed that retort.

As the representative, Ryuzaki spoke.

"Who's there?"

"That voice, Ryuzaki ... it's Ryuzaki after all!?"

Gasagasa, looking at the boy who showed his figure from the moving bushes, they were wide-eyed in surprised.

"It's me, me! Everyone, it's been a long time...!"

"Kogane...!?"

Looking at the appearance of the high elf who was smiling carefreely, Goubayashi narrowed his eyes without saying anything, Harao and Nekomiya had an appearance like they didn't know what kind of attitude they should take. Akai crossed her arms in a place a little away and didn't show any emotion. The one who should have been imprisoned by the blood clan, Kogane Yoshiki. *Why is he here?* Ryuzaki also got confuse first before feeling relieved.

"Yo—you, why are you here.... Have you been safe up until now...?"

"Yup. Suou and others treated me well."

Suou, that word felt familiar. It could be seen that Nekomiya's body had stiffened. Suou the Knight. He was a member of the blood clan that had once come in contact with her, Kyousuke and Rin. Certainly, his name was «*Suou Takafumi*». According to Akai's story, he was a high school student same as themselves.

"I wanted to convey the story to everyone properly. Since there's Ryuzaki the story will be quick, Suou and his group aren't bad guys..."

As Kogane attempted to say, he shut his mouth. His gaze turned toward one

member over here.

“A—Akai...”

“Don’t worry about me.”

Akai still with her arms crossed, glared at Kogane once and said in a cold tone.

“I don’t know what Suou has inspired you with, but Kogane should say what you want to say first.”

“Eh, ummm...”

Kogane while glancing at Akai continued the story. He seemed a little awkward.

“Yeah, ummm.... Yes, Suou, is not a bad guy. They came from the same world as us, so, that is, there was just an unfortunate crossing with each others, but I think we can cooperate...”

“Do you know about Washio?”

“Washio?”

When asked with a slightly thorny tone, Kogane tilted his head.

“What happened with Washio? Speaking of which, I have to apologize to that guy too. Is he doing well?”

Ryuzaki was convinced. This guy didn’t know that Washio had died. The one who directly laid her hands on Washio was that woman Bishop Akeno but it was unlikely that it wasn’t conveyed to Suou. Suou intentionally hid it from Kogane.

“Washio is dead.”

The one who informed him of that was Akai.

“...Eh?”

“Shall I say it once more. Washio is dead. He fought with Akeno. Kogane, have you not heard?”

Kogane had yet to break his foolish smile. He probably couldn’t understood Akai’s words.

“It, it’s a lie...? Such a thing, Suou, even a single word was...”

“He was thinking that he cannot detain Kogane if he said it, isn’t he? With that condition, I guess you have also heard that I betrayed the King.”

Probably Kogane had been persuaded by that guy Suou. There would be no doubt about that. If thinking that the blood clan were trying to supplying the students of 2nd year class 4 as war potential, the plan of trying to contact through Kogane also wasn't something difficult to imagine. However, the fact that he wasn't informed of Kogane's death was unnatural. If Kogane came in contact with this side, the truth would immediately be exposed. So the act of coming in contact with this side should have been taboo if Suou were trying to hide Washio's death from Kogane.

"Ryu-Ryuzaki ... is that true...?"

Kogane asked Ryuzaki with an entreating look. Ryuzaki closed his eyes, breathed in heavily and nodded.

"It's true. Washio is dead. We also did a funeral."

"Such a.... Eh, but, Washio.... Eh...?"

If Suou had intentionally sent Kogane over here, then his purpose wasn't to persuade this side.

"There is a possibility that the hydra itself was a trap to lure us out."

Goubayashi said with his arms crossed. Startled, Kogane's shoulders trembled. He couldn't lie.

Assuming so, then the enemy's purpose was to split their war potential.

"Look like we better hurry up."

"Ahh, we should leave the hydra extermination for later."

Ryuzaki nodded to Nekomiya's words. The enemy's plan was probably to attract this side main war potential by using the hydra and Kogane, during that time, Suou or Akeno, or possibly both of them would come in contact with the branch school. In that case, they had no time to waste at this place.

Goubayashi, Harao and others also silently showed their consent. Ryuzaki turned his back to Kogane.

"Ryuzaki...!"

"My bad, Kogane. We have to hurry back to the branch school. This story more properly..."

"Wa-wait...! Wait, Ryuzaki, I ... I, errr, still...!"

Kogane desperately tried to detained this side while showing confusion and dismay. However, the room to listen to his story is———,

“———《*Possessed Sylph*》!”

At that time, Kogane gave forth words with obviously different atmosphere from until then.

“《*Wind Cutter*》!”

“.....!!”

Blade of wind cut through the air and violently attacked from behind. Ryuzaki barely reacted in time to cover for Nekomiya who had the lowest defensive power among them. When he made sure to hold the black cat and rolled over the bushes, 『*Ni~yaa~!?*』, he heard a scream.

When he looked back, Kogane had an expression like he was scare of something and stretched out his right arm. His whole body was wrapped up in light green light, and parts of his body and clothes changed like wind visualized. It was an ability that he didn't show before being kidnapped. When looking at Akai's direction, she nodded with a displeased face. *It's Phase 2. Moreover, he probably drew a considerably powerful thing.*

“So, sorry...! Sorry, Ryuzaki, but, I...! I will talk, with Suou and...!”

Simultaneously, there was breaking sound, slimy scales pushed down the trees and started surrounding Ryuzaki group.

“The hydra?”

“It was really a trap then.”

Goubayashi muttered while crossing his arms. Harao also nodded. Those guys intended to nail this side down in this place no at all costs. Kogane was confused by receiving the new information called Washio's death. As a result, he was trying to concentrate on only the part that had been assigned to him by Suou in the beginning.

The war potential of the heavy cruiser branch school was almost empty at the moment. If they received an attack of a Knight or Bishop, they would received devastating damage. At least, they had to sent Akai back to the heavy cruiser even if it as just her alone.

“Akaiiii! Is Akai’s here!!”

Just at that time, hooves sound echoed like pushing its way through the bushes.

«*That*» made a resounding sound that made one felt its weight and settled down on the heavy cruiser branch school. The burly forelegs reminiscent of tiger or bear gouged deeply on the deck. Its face was that of lion and goat, its tail was a snake. Kyouzuke instantly understood that it was a synthetic beast. From its big frame reaching to 5 meters in length, an eerie intimidating atmosphere was drifting about.

The place it settled down was exactly behind Sakuma. It was a form of pincher attack together with Suou, completely blocking her path of retreat. In front of Sakuma and Kyouzuke was Suou, behind them was the chimera.

When looking at the chimera, Kyouzuke felt exceedingly difficult to continue keeping his calm.

The face of lion and goat, and then the snake tail was fine. However, what grew on the chimera’s back was bird of prey’s wings. Just, it wasn’t any ordinary wings. In its back seemed to buried an eagle head. That thing that was looking to the void with its vacant eyes, Kyouzuke understood.

“Washio-kun...?”

“Cruel...”

Sakuma opened her eyes wides and muttered in a hoarse voice. Rin’s voice was also trembling.

“Such wicked hobby...!”

The one who shouted that was Kensaki. Her words as well was oozing out enough anger that could be obviously understood just from hearing.

Not just Kensaki, the students who witnessed the chimera’s figure that obviously seemed to be recycling Washio’s remains, was burning with fighting spirit. The brunt of their anger was naturally aimed at Suou. *Fun*, Suou snorted, and then muttered with feeling of self-derision.

“Since it’s like this, there is no more room for «*negotiation*» anymore.”

Kyouzuke tightly clenched his fists and glared at Suou.

“Now I have no choice but to make everyone obedient with «*blood*». You guys as well Kogane.”

Before those words finished until the end, Kyousuke started running, raised his clenched fists and struck. But that was easily caught by Suou with one hand.

“.....!!”

Kyousuke tried to bash him with the free left hand, but that too was caught. Rin shouted.

“Utsurogi-kun, such unreasonable is...!”

“That’s right, I understand your feelings but you cannot defeat me even if you get this enthusiastic.”

Suou said with a cold tone, slapped Kyousuke’s body down on the deck with just physical strength alone.

“Gaa...!”

“In that condition, even Phase 2 ability will be dead. You got weaker than before, what do you come out for.”

Saying that much, Suou kicked Kyousuke away. Immediately afterward, he caught Kensaki’s sword that came flying in from behind, and drove a yakuza kick into her abdomen. Kensaki also screamed, and again rolled on the deck.

“There’s no difficulty. Chimera, clean up quickly.”

“GUOOOOUU!!”

Responding to Suou’s order, the chimera roared. It spread Washio’s wing and flapped them once, then each feathers were shot like missile. This was also Washio’s technique. At the moment when Sakuma tried to chant a spell to intercept the approaching feathers, he nape was grabbed from behind by Suou.

“Ah...!”

Sakuma whose magic chanting was interrupted, was stabbed by the feathers. Her eyes noticeably opened wide strongly, and as Suou released his hands, her body collapsed on the deck.

“Saa-chan...!”

“Sa, kuma...!”

Rin screamed, Kyousuke also tried to stand up and reached out his hand.

Sakuma collapsed, her white skin like snowflake crystal turned even paler and she floated a painful looking expression. Weak hands movement reached out to the feathers stabbed from her collarbone to her right upper arm.

“No way, poison...?”

“Good insight.”

Suou answered to Kagoi’s mutter. The chimera made a low groan, and this time it broke into a run aiming at that Kagoi and others. Kagoi, Okumura, Zeku etc took that rush. Uozumi older brother launched his scales, Uozumi little sister intercepted with attack magic of water attribute.

Meanwhile, Suou dropped his gaze back to Sakuma who collapsed on the floor. Sakuma pulled out the feather lodged in the area of her collarbone. From the stab wound, bead of blood welled up.

“For now, I should take just the succubus home. And then I would like to destroy this ship...”

While saying so, Suou grab Sakuma’s arm and forcibly forced her to stand. Sakuma desperately struggled to resist but perhaps it was the fault of the poison, she couldn’t put strength into her body at all. As for the other students, they were being hindered by the chimera and couldn’t go to her rescue.

“S, top...!”

Kyousuke stood up and glared at Suou.

“Himemizu, can you go...!”

“I’m ready at anytime.”

Rin’s calm heart echoed inside his heart. But her body had yet to become familiar to him. Kyousuke clenched his fist and ran on the deck. Suou, still grabbed Sakuma’s arm and raised her up, directed a chilling gaze at Kyousuke and lightly caught his fist as before.

“It’s useless no matter how many time you come.”

He lightly declared and kicked Kyousuke.

“Ga...!”

“Kyaa...!”

“I thought I told you Utsurogi, you’re empty, no matter how much you do it’s the same thing.”

Suou looking down at Kyouusuke. Suou, with all his strength, trample down on Kyouusuke who rolled on the deck and was trying to stand up.

“Utsu, rogi-kun ... Himemizu, san...”

Sakuma whose face was turning blue, while repeating rough breathing, looked at Kyouusuke.

Kyouusuke was trying to stand up but he couldn’t resist Suou’s strength pressing down on top of him. At this rate, Sakuma was going to be kidnapped. It wouldn’t be Sakuma alone. Even the students who had to do their utmost just to fight back the chimera’s power from the front as well, eventually, they would be exhausted, had the freedom of their body snatched away by the poisonous feathers and be kidnapped. And then, what was carrying that out was Washio’s power.

Against that, Kyouusuke could only look.

No matter how much he tried to put power into his body, Kyouusuke was powerless. As Suou had said, it was the same no matter what he did.

“That, but...!”

“Ohh...?”

Kyouusuke who was trying to stand up felt a sense that Rin’s body got a little accustomed to his body.

Immediately afterwards, Rin’s consciousness flowed into Kyouusuke just a little bit. The syrupy gelatinous leaking stopped, power filled his body. It was a sense like the bypass had connected.

Suou looked at Kyouusuke who tried to stand up, however, his cold attitude remained unchanged.

“It’s pointless.”

Those words seemed to contain some irritation.

Suou removed his legs, then immediately gave a strong kick to Kyouusuke’s stomach. That kick was stronger than any blow that Suou had ever released

before. Kyousuke was blown off and crashed into the handrail on the deck. Rin's syrupy body flowed out from his body. She fainted. She had continued to «*puritendo*» to combine with Kyousuke all the way until then, so it was unavoidable that she reached her limit.

Is this how it is in the end?

At the last of the last moment, he regained a little of his power, his confidence or possibly hope. But even that was like garbage before this overwhelming different in power. Kogane, Sakuma, Washio, other classmates, and finally himself,

“You, can save, no one.”

While hearing those words from Suou, Kyousuke let go of his consciousness to darkness.

Utsurogi's consciousness was sinking in darkness. He was sinking in darkness that he didn't know its bottom, didn't know how far it stretched.

I couldn't help even a single person.

In the end, I guess it is this stupid and unsightly fate appropriate for a wooden doll that didn't try to look at his own inside.

Because of a stupid play the house was set on fire, his parents were killed, so at least, he made an effort to become a splendid human that could do something for the sake of others as his parents had told him. The result was this. Continuing to avert his eyes from his ugly inner self, keeping on painting mud only on the outside and strengthen it, he made a splendid building purely in appearance. A container without contents. That was him.

He wanted to help Sakuma. He didn't want students like Kogane or Washio to appear ever again. For that reason, he was reckless and tried to summon his power, but even then it was only power on the outside. It wasn't accompanied by any substance.

He made Himemizu Rin go along with that.

She was a good girl. She was gentle, bright, and could do something for the sake of others much more than someone like him, a splendid girl. That Rin too, Kyousuke had made her go along with him, but in the end, he couldn't respond to her expectation.

Will I die like this?

Will Rin also decay in the same way?

Sakuma, Kensaki, and other students as well. Even if he shouted that he hated it, he already had no power to do anything anymore.

«Utsurogi-kun»

Suddenly, he heard a voice called out to him. A voice that made him feel relieved when hearing, a voice that he had grown very familiar with in the past 1 and a half month.

«Utsurogi-kun. Utsurogi Kyouzuke-kun»

«Hime, mizu»

Himemizu Rin's figure hazily emerged in front of him. Rather than emerged, it was an image like she was submerging to Kyouzuke's place who was sinking deeper. It seemed that she was in her human form but whether it was an image based on Kyouzuke's memory, her details was vague.

Just before fainting, Kyouzuke and Rin's bodies were in contact. This was probably a telepathic link using Kyouzuke's ability. During combine, they could exchange their mutual consciousness even without words, this was an extension of that. Or possibly because Kyouzuke's body's function had mostly stopped that it became an exchange in darkness like this.

«It's okay, Utsurogi-kun. We can still fight, we will manage somehow.»

He somehow understood that Rin in front of him was smiling.

«Manage? I couldn't do anything in the end. I'm just an empty guy without anything that I really want to do and just want to others to praise me.»

«Isn't it fine? So then.»

Pon, Rin put her hand on Kyouzuke's head.

«It's fine if you don't have anything you want to do, it's also fine even if you just want other's praises, it's also fine to be empty. If that's the person called Utsurogi Kyouzuke-kun, there's not really any problem like this. There is no need to be something else, is there?»

This was the first time he was told something like this. Kyouzuke was

confused.

Kyousuke had continuously averting his eyes from his contents. *There's no way that my true nature is like that.* It was because he didn't want to admit it no matter how empty and vague his contents were.

However, Himemizu easily said «*it's fine like this*». What Kyousuke had desperately denying so far, Rin affirmed it without any hesitation.

But, I am,

«Even if Himemizu is fine with it, I hate it...»

I'm a troublesome guy, he thought, and diverted his gaze.

Despite having been given that much gentle words, Kyousuke couldn't reward it.

«Well then, Kyousuke-kun. If you cannot come to like yourself, come to like me.»

Without being able to understand those words, Kyousuke tilted his head.

«I or Hino-kun, Saa-chan, everyone in the class, come to like us more and more. Because everyone doesn't hate Kyousuke-kun as much as Kyousuke-kun do»

«That is...»

«I won't let you say you can't do it. Because Kyousuke likes everyone. You want to help, wanted to help Kogane-kun, Washio-kun, Saa-chan, don't you think so? It's okay. Because everyone surely likes Kyousuke-kun.»

Little by little, little by little, the poison going inside came out from his body. His inner face that he could never look directly at, he was going to look at it through the mirrors call other people. Himself that was reflected in the eyes of the girl of him, in Himemizu Rin's eyes wasn't as ugly as he was thinking? Or was she saying that she like him including that ugliness?

«Kyousuke-kun, do you still think you're empty?»

Rin asked. Kyousuke nodded.

«There are a lot of things missing, a lot of chippings, do you dislike yourself being like that?»

Rin continued. Kyousuke nodded again.

«Understood. It's fine, Kyousuke-kun. Because I will fill in all those missing parts as well as those chipping parts.»

«Himemizu...”*

«If Kyousuke-kun's heart is missing, I will become your heart. If you say that you have no contents, I will become that contents. If there's no flesh, I will become your flesh, if there's no organs, I will become your organs, if there's no skin, I will become your skin.»

In consciousness of Utsurogi Kyousuke, the consciousness of Himemizu Rin flowed in. The connected bypass was becoming thicker and stronger. Rin's appearance in front of him, accompanied with her memory, was changing to more clear and vivid. At the same time, Rin tightly hugged Kyousuke.

«When you want to get angry, I will give you eyes, mouth, and heart. When you want to cry, I will give you cheeks, throat and tears. Even when you want to delight, when you want to laugh, I will give you every parts is missing. I won't let anyone say Kyousuke-kun is empty anymore.»

I want to become water to fill you.

Rin's consciousness strongly told him.

«Let's combine. Kyousuke-kun. We have to go help Saa-chan.»

Rin's words had a slight trace of tension. *Let's go help Sakuma and everyone.* It was what he wanted.

But was that really possible?

«We can. If together with you, we can go anywhere. Let's combine, Kyousuke-kun. Both mind and body, let's them become one.»

«Ahh...»

Kyousuke nodded. The heart that felt empty to that extent, he had a feeling that it seemed to be filled up with something. A sense of satisfaction that the empty container was satisfied at once. Kyousuke gradually became unable to control the power of the emotion that was boiling up. Words like a curse that had bound his body, everything were rinsed off by Himemizu Rin.

There were many missing pieces. But even that was being compensated, and Rin's power filled up his entire body.

«Ah, that's right.»

Rin image suddenly raised her face and said.

«What's wrong?»

«No well, since I can only do such a thing in the image world anyway.»

Rin's lips softly overlapped with Kyouzuke's.

“Seeiyaatsu!!”

A flame bullet rushed at Suou who was carrying Sakuma on his side, trying to kidnap her. Suou was a little delayed in coping with the surprise attack from an unexpected direction. Although he would received no big damage even if it was a direct hit, he dropped Sakuma who was being held.

Sakuma rolled on deck and groaned a little. She raised her face with both hands.

“Uu.... Hi, no, kun...”

Floating there was Hino Akira whose entire body were flaring up with flame close to twice as usual.

“Take a rest, Sakuma. You're the same as Kyouzuke, If leave alone you will do something unreasonable.”

It was the same speech as usual. Although he mostly remained in bed during cruising because of seasickness, he was very talkative at the moment. Sakuma ignored Akira's advice of «take a rest», still with her hands propped on the floor, looked in Kyouzuke and Rin's direction.

Kyouzuke rolled over on the ground, Rin was coiling around him. Neither of them had any sign of even twitching.

Meanwhile, Suou directed irritated gaze toward the sudden intruder.

“A wisp that hasn't even become Phase 2 is taking a very composed attitude?”

“My nature is like this. You are Suou? It seems that you did a lot of cruel things to my best friends.”

Akira's words was spoken quietly, but his tone was shaking with strong anger. Since even Sakuma could feel it, probably for Akira himself, it should be a

considerably unmanageable feeling. It wasn't easy to have a chance of seeing Akira swelling up close to twice as usual after all.

But wisp is a low rank monster. Even if it was said to be strong against physical attack, how much of a good fight could he show against Knight Suou whom the leading combat personnel failed even as a group?

“Ahh, the one who will fight isn't me.”

When Akira said that, Sakuma was taken aback and looked at Kyousuke direction. Same as before, the two people were completely exhausted and didn't move even one finger. A little something like steam started to raise from the two body. It expanded spirally and was trying to enclose the figure of Kyousuke and Rin.

“U, Uozumi, sann!!”

Sakuma shouted with as big a voice as possible to Uozumi Masuyo who was fighting the chimera.

“Utsurogi-kun, water!!”

“What...!”

With Sakuma's shout, Suou noticed. He tried to silence her with a kick, but Akira cut in and raised the thermal power all at once. Suou's foot was exposed to a directional heat wave that melt even the deck. Suou clicked his tongue and retracted his kick.

Uozumi Masuyo, as was told by Sakuma, started chanting water magic. The chimera spread Washio's wings and took a stance to shoot poisonous feathers. Masuyo's older brother, Sakeichiro forced his way in front of her and restrained it with scale bullets. With the shooting of poisonous feathers delayed several beats, Kagoi's cover made it in time. All the shoot feathers were repelled by the gargoyle's tough stone skin without reaching Masuyo.

Sakuma who had given a loud voice even though poison was circulating through her body, entrusted her body to the floor while her consciousness went hazy.

《*Characteristics Amplification*》, for a skeleton with this as its Phase 2 ability, what sort of things its Phase 3 would be, Sakuma had heard from Akai. Kyousuke would reach that very soon. Rin had succeeded in bringing him back.

As expected, she thought, with dual meanings swirling in her chest. *But I have to do as much as I can now.*

Uozumi Masuyo invoke the chanted magic and pour water on Kyousuke and Rin's body. Rin's body absorbed the water and wrapped up Kyousuke's body. The spiral steam raising from their body soon became a tornado and wrapped up the two people.

“...OOOOOOOOOO— — —”

A roaring voice was heard from inside the tornado. Sakuma was relieved. That voice belonged to «*him*». So he stood up again as expected. Sakuma slowly closed her eyes and gave herself to the floor while holding a peaceful conviction to the too slow revival. Meanwhile, the roaring voice became louder, and then the tornado wrapping up Kyousuke and Rin's body gradually weakened.

“— — —OOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO— — —”

Everyone on the spot confirmed the presence of a human shadow shouting in the tornado.

That was a shout of joy, of anger and grief. The appearance of every emotions endlessly overflowing from the container that should have been empty. Loaded with unmanageable excess of his heart, he shouted.

“— — —OOOOOOOOOOOOAAAAAAAAAAAAaaaaa!!!”

At the end of that scream, the shadow brushed away the tornado with his own arm. No one in this place was able to divert their gaze from him. Even Suou was the same. He forgot to move, his body nailed on the spot. Crimson eyes peeked through the gap of the brushed away wind and glared at Suou.

“Phase 3 at this timing...!”

Suou's voice was getting a little hoarse.

“Queen, has turned only this guy to her kin...!? Shit, but why...!”

“It seems your bet is off. Knight Suou.”

Akira said in a tone full of confidence for some reason.

“I was allowed to read Akai's documents so it's no mistake. This is Phase 3 of

《*Characteristics Amplification*》. It is a temporary combine, but now, Kyousuke and Himemizu is in a complete fusion state at cellular level, molecule level and magicule level. So to speak, EX Stream Cross. Yes, let's name it Extreme Cross!!”
“Don't just arbitrarily name it...”

Kyousuke made an amazed face and said. Although temporary, that figure had changed too much made the students completely dumbfounded. An androgynous looks that couldn't be said to be man or woman. Slender body and light blue hair. This figure that was delicately built up that seemed to be human, was the ideal form that was put together during the sympathetic consciousness connection of Kyousuke and Rin. Precisely because the two were in a state of complete fusion that this mimicry was possible.

“Sorry. However, I yielded the all the important parts of bringing you back to Rin. It's okay with just this much side benefit, isn't it?”

“So he say, Rin.”

«Well, speaking of benefit, I also got some so anything is okay.»

Kyousuke shrugged his shoulders, Rin voice was naturally heard from somewhere of his body. It was a stupid conversation, but Suou's expression as he was looking at that was grim.

“U—Utsurogi...!”

On behalf of the dumbfounded students, Kensaki raised a her voice.

“And Himemizu too.... Are you okay now?”

«Perfectly!!»

Rin replied with a shout. Kyousuke also nodded.

“Ahh, I've made you worried. For now, leave this to ... oops.”

“GUOOOOOU!!”

Whether Suou's wariness was transmitted, The chimera shook off Okumura and Zeku who were trying to held it down and turned its face toward Kyousuke direction. The chimera howl and charged at Kyousuke. Kyousuke didn't even try to avoid that. At the moment of collision, **bashan**, with sound of water, the chimera fell forward and rolled on the deck.

“Huh...!”

Suou's voice was full of astonishment. The chimera's attack didn't received any resistance, completely as if it attacked water. Among the students who was watching that, Kensaki, as before, most obediently expressed her surprise.

"Eh, liquefied!?"

"It's nothing surprising. This is Kyouusuke and Rin completely fused. They can freely manipulate even the composition of body tissue. Of course, liquefaction including bones is the basic among basics."

"Why is Hino explaining it so happily..."

Thinking to entrust the explanation to his very delighted best friend, Kyouusuke turned around to the chimera direction. Liquefaction was instant. The structure of the body returned immediately.

He released a full powered punched to the face of the chimera who stood up.

""ORYAAA!!""

There was not even a slight lag in the link of their consciousness. From density manipulation to hardening, everything was done instantly, and the resulting exploding impact broke off the goat neck of the chimera in a single blow. The remaining lion head screamed, it writhed in pain while pinning down its wound. Glancingly, Kyouusuke directed his gaze toward Sakuma who fell over on the deck. It seemed that she just fainted, but probably that poison from just now still remained strong. There was the possibility that after-effect would remain if her treatment was delayed.

«Kyouusuke-kun, Saa-chan is...»

"Ahh, I know. We will heal Sakuma's poison quickly. For that sake as well..."

Kyouusuke tightly clenched his fists, took a Jeet Kune Do stance and confronted the chimera.

"First of all, let's have them return Washio from that body!!"

Chapter 41: Extreme Dream

The empty container that had been built for 17 years. Water was pouring in at momentum that it couldn't fit in to that container that was made of splendid mud with only outward appearance. The container instantly approached the bursting point and it became emotions overflowing from his entire body.

Anger that Sakuma was hurt,

Sorrow for losing Washio,

And then, joy of being able to accept himself,

Everything overflowed from Kyousuke's body. Kyousuke who had been called empty until then didn't know the technique to control the endlessly overflowing emotions. What he could do then was only to hit the enemy in front of him with full power. At the same time as he took a stand, the GO-signal came out from his body. Rin's consciousness that lost its boundary flowed into Kyousuke's consciousness. *Let's go, Kyousuke-kun.*

Extreme Cross.

Utsurogi Kyousuke who reached Phase 3 had fused with Rin on a cellular level. The same applied even for the smallest units of physics and magic, molecule and magicule.

This power that manifested as a human figure, was it because Rin had said that she would compensate for the missing things? She became meat, became organs, became skin, and then became the heart that stimulate everything. Utsurogi Kyousuke who was only bones was given every chipped parts.

It doesn't matter even if empty. It doesn't matter no matter what everyone say. This rising uplifting feeling is never a lie.

There's someone who accept me.

There's someone who fills my contents.

I can still fight with just that. I can go anywhere.

"GUOOOOOO!!"

The face of a lion tailored to the chimera roar. It struck with its burly forelegs, trying to claw at him. But it was ineffective against Kyousuke. Kyousuke turned

into water in a state of standing upright, and its claws just scratched the water, making a **bashan** sound.

Kyousuke raised his right fist and struck between the eyebrows of the chimera. It faltered but it wasn't enough to be a decisive blow. This hardheaded skull.

He saw Suou moved in the corner of his sight. That guy didn't show any sign of coming to attack this place. As a Knight whose only means of attack was physical attack, he judged that it was disadvantageous to compete. So Suou was trying to kidnap Sakuma who collapsed on the deck. Faster than Kyousuke could go to help, the other students who was waiting for their turns simultaneously sprung at Suou.

"I won't alloow thaaaaaht!!"
"Tskk!"

Starting with one slash of Kensaki the raid captain, Okumura, Zeku, Kagoi, the ones prided for their brute strength snapped at Suou in succession. The strength of every one of them was insignificant before Suou. Even so, they confined Suou with their utmost efforts, not allowing him to get closer to Sakuma.

The chimera also took advantage of the gap Kyousuke showed when he relaxed his hand and rearranged its posture. It greatly spread Washio's wings. *It's shooting poisonous feathers.* Kyousuke glanced behind. The students were literally lumping together to hold back Suou. If Kyousuke avoided or performed permeation defense by liquefaction, the poisonous feathers would rush at them.

«All right!»

Rin shouted. According to her will that naturally flowed in, Kyousuke spread both his arms.

«Let's give it a try!!»

The chimera shot poisonous feathers. Up to dozens of feathers simultaneously rushed at Kyousuke. Washio's feathers, which became sharp thorn at the tip of the base, was stabbing in Kyousuke's body with sputtering sound.

He knew that Kensaki and others who looked at the situation over here gulped

a little. As for Kyouzuke himself, he felt a sense of poison circulating and his head was little dizzy.

But at that moment, Rin fully demonstrated her ability. She extracted the bleeding poison, gathered it in one place, diluted a part of it and circulate it throughout the body. The fused cells that constituted Kyouzuke's entire body refined antibodies in order to protect the body functionality from the circulating poison.

"Hi, Himemizu.... A very skillful action..."

«Let's deliver these antibodies to Saa-chan!»

"O, ou...!"

Kyouzuke, after drove a kick to the chimera to frighten it, rushed over to Sakuma. She who had collapsed, he shook her awake and extracted the poisonous feathers pierced in her body. He gently put his fingertip on the wound oozing blood.

"U, Utsurogi, kun...?"

"Ahh, it's me. Sorry to have kept you waiting, Sakuma."

Kyouzuke powerfully nodded to Sakuma who looked up at him with vacant eyes. The antibodies Rin manufactured was poured into her through the wound. It was a temporary treatment for the poison. Probably, the one who could completely heal her was Hakuba alone. But it should be a lot more comfortable for her with this.

Pushing away his other classmates, Suou came striking at Kyouzuke. Kyouzuke, while avoiding by liquefying his body, throw a counter-punch to his solar plexus.

""UO—RYAAA!!""

"Guu...!"

Suou held down his stomach and faltered a little. But, it didn't go well to the point of knocking him down. Most probably, the mass of water constituting Kyouzuke's body was overwhelmingly insufficient. Nevertheless, Kensaki and others stood in front of Kyouzuke during that gap.

"Utsurogi, you guys take the chimera!"

"Ou!"

«Leave it us!»

We have to reach a conclusion soon. Kyousuke glared at the chimera. Taking back Washio's body from that blasphemous monstrosity. Kyousuke wasn't softhearted enough to still kept his calm when his friend was killed and that corpse was toyed with. No, he wasn't softhearted.

The anger that was seething to this extent, Kyousuke just wasn't self-conscious of it. This feeling was very similar to the distant past, the thought when he raised his fists to Kogane who tried to sell out his friends. Kyousuke's emotion was further refined compared to that time. This is what you call getting angry.

“UOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOo!!”

Kyousuke roared toward heaven again. He didn't know any other means to deal with this boiling emotion.

“Let's go, Rin!!”

«Alrighty!»

Liquefying the whole body, Kyousuke and Rin jumped into the chimera's jaw. They had the liquefied body permeated every single cells and explored for Washio's body.

Dispersing their body would weaken the control power accordingly. If doing it unskillfully, they would be taken in as the chimera's somatic cells as is, or possibly be disposed of by the antibodies as foreign substances. However, Kyousuke and Rin immediately pushed forward inside the chimera's body. They found Washio's upper body embedded in the chimera. Kyousuke and Rin aimed at that point and reassembled, rebuilding their body.

“”ORYAAAAAAa!!””

The chimera's back was tore into two parts. Kyousuke carried Washio's upper body and jumped out. The chimera twisted in pain and raised a scream that shook the deck.

The place Kyousuke landed was exactly Hanazono's vegetable garden. Carrots and parsleys grew verdantly and were blooming flowers. Kyousuke laid down Washio's body on the deck, in front of those flowers. The vacant eyes that were opened, were gently closed.

The rest is only to knock them down.

«Kyousuke-kun!»

Kyousuke nodded to Rin's words. The chimera managed to stand up despite being in pain and was glaring over here.

“GUOOOOOOOOOOOUu!!”

Together with a roar, the chimera sprung at this place. Kyousuke clenched his fist and greatly pulled it back.

Synchronized his breathing with Rin, was unnecessary. Their consciousness were completely overlapped with the same timing.

“”EXTREME BLOW———OWW!!””

The fist that put their entire body was thrown at the chimera's face. At the moment when the impact exploded, Kyousuke's arm burst open like water and disappeared. A calm moment descended on the battlefield. The chimera's movement stopped, Kyousuke also didn't show any slight movement. Wind blew gently. Fresh blood gushed out from the chimera's entire body. The monstrosity's death agony echoed on the deck. When Kyousuke pulled back his fist, his right arm was reconstructed.

«Fushiiyuuu!»

He knew that Rin took a short breathe. But the battle wasn't over yet.

“Ahh, shit!”

When Kyousuke glared at him, Suou roughly scratched his head. While dodging the students springing at him, he spread wings on his back.

“Why has it become like this...! Good grief...!”

“Feel like running away...!?”

“Mission failed! There's no reason to stay!”

Shouting that much, Suou kicked the deck and flew up to the blue sky without even leaving one regretful remark. As it was, he flew straight in the direction of the towering old castle. That castle was Suou side's hideout. In that case, it was very likely that Kogane was over there as well.

“Kyousuke!”

As Kyousuke was glaring at Suou who was flying away, Akira called out from behind.

“It’s best of all that you seem to have recovered. I couldn’t be helpful to you these past few days, sorry.”

“What’s this, Akira, was it bothering you?”

“Well, somewhat.”

Hino Akira’s words were a little awkward. It was because he couldn’t move these past few days due to seasickness, so saying that it couldn’t be helped then it couldn’t be helped, but it didn’t mean that he especially demanded such consolation or anything. Kyouzuke, while scratching his forehead, said this.

“Apart from that, I have always been helped by Akira, so that doesn’t matter. Please treat me well from now on as well.”

“You’re the same as ever. I think being like that is more desirable.”

In response to Akira’s words, Rin muttered, «*Ohh, it’s the usual Hino-kun*».

“You should say the same words to Sakuma later. Since it has always been bothering her that she couldn’t be by your side.”

As he was told, after Akai conveyed her circumstances to the class, Sakuma had been running around defusing in order to cancel the *hate* toward Akai, or study regarding Phase 3 abilities. As a result, she couldn’t show his face in Kyouzuke’s vicinity.

Other students were about to carry that collapsed Sakuma to her bedroom. Looking at that situation, Kyouzuke nodded firmly.

“What, has it already finished?”

They heard an anticlimactic voice, and sounds of hooves striking the dropped down gangway. Speaking of hooves in this class, there was only Hakuba. At the same time, Kaminari Totoha who spread her great wings also returned to the branch school.

They were the two people who were on standby at the branch school as contact personnel in case of emergency. They were supposed to have jumped out from the branch school at the same timing as Suou attack in order to call the main force, but....

“Even though I have brought Akai-san with much trouble.”

“Ahh, that’s right.”

Hakuba muttered in a complicated voice. Looking at it, Akai Asuka was sitting on top of his saddle, not by straddling but like sitting on a bench. Looking at that situation, the boys who were trying to carry Sakuma, faced together and started a whispering discussion for some reason. Those guys were beaten by Kensaki with all her strength.

Akai, first looked at Sakuma collapsed on the floor, then looked at Inugami who was trying to carry her while having wounds all over her own body, and finally, looked at Kyousuke and Rin.

“Phase 3, it was faster than I thought.”

“O-ou...”

Hakuba who was close to Washio was supposed to be worsening his distrust of Akai. That him giving Akai’s a ride on his back was surprising.

When Hakuba dropped off Akai, he noticed that Washio’s remains was laid down in a corner of the deck, before the vegetable garden. There was no words to said to him who silently approached while drooping his head.

«Akai-san, got on...»

Whether she thought that it was better to break the awkward silence, Rin said something unnecessary.

“What, something wrong?”

«No, I think it’s a wonderful thing in these days when the disturbance of youth’s nature is being called out.» [Notes]

Akai’s «*something wrong?*» in response to Rin’s words contained 30% more dangerous atmosphere than usual.

“Utsurogi, I should better hurry if you want to chase Suou. Because there are Kogane and others over there.”

Kyousuke raised his face at Akai’s words. *Was it as expected?* As Kyousuke was trying to brave his feet, she continued on.

“Phase 3 ability is to bring out the power of ‘*blood*’, so there’s a limit to activity. Take care about that alone.”

“Power of ‘*blood*’?”

“It’s like fuel.”

Akira supplemented Akai's words.

"Akai's blood possesses the power to draw out the latent ability of monsters that passed through the Transference Denaturation Gate, but that power will dry up when use for a long period of time. Once exhausted, there's no choice but to wait for the power of '*blood*' to recover."

«Ohh, an easy power up is not allowed...»

"Kyouzuke's power up is already plenty easy."

Akira's retort to Rin's words was at point blank.

"Kogane is fighting with Ryuzaki and the others now. Can you hurry up?"

"Understood. Kaminari!"

When Kyouzuke called out, the thunderbird who was resting her wings on top of the cabin abruptly raised her face.

"Would you mind going to Kogane and the others' place again? Please carry us!"

"Ah, yes!"

Kaminari spread her wings, flapped once and soared to the sky. Kyouzuke stretched his right arm and twined around her legs, then using the shrinking momentum to jumped on her back.

"Kogane, listen to our story!"

Kogane's magic with Phase 2 ability activated easily mowed down trees and pulverized them. Ryuzaki called out to him while dodging his attacks. Kogane, however, still had the expression like being afraid of something, and continued rapid-firing magic one after another.

Chantless rapid-firing of magic by means of spiritualization of physical body, as well as increasing power and range. That was Kogane's Phase 2. Akai had explained that it was «*Spirit Possession*». Probably it was the blooming with direct guidance from the blood clan. Even among High Elf's Phase 2 abilities, his was of exceedingly high rarity.

"Class rep! That guy can no longer hear what we say!"

"I know! That's why I'm trying to make him hear it!"

"Ahh, geez! Both Goubayashi and Harao, please say something!"

Nekomiya who was standing in a place slightly away from Ryuzaki, shouted. Presently, the only one who was facing Kogane was Ryuzaki alone. Goubayashi, Harao and then Nekomiya were dealing with the hydra surrounding them. They were fighting without both Akai and Ryuzaki, so naturally, the battle was unfavorable.

Kogane's magical ability was powerful, but it was easy to totally suppress him if Ryuzaki used his «*Perfect Dragonization*». He should silenced that guy by taking his spirit magic with the dragon scale that excelled in physical resistance and magic resistance, struck with the tail or flame breath, etc. So claimed Nekomiya.

However,

“Let him be. He's that sort of guy.”

“Indeed.”

“There's only stupid men in this class...!”

Among these, Nekomiya who had the lowest offensive ability was desperately running from place to place to escape the looming hydra's jaws.

“I mean, why has Harao master Phase 2 ability!?”

“T's because I'm well-bred.”

While similarly avoided the hydra's jaws that continuously approached, Harao replied. He wasn't running from place to place like Nekomiya. Still with the posture of putting both hands around his back, his figure went **fu** and disappeared. The next movement, Harao was standing in a different place. It was instant movement. And when he raised the ankh holding in his right hand, one of the heads chasing after Harao's movement completely stopped as though being paralyzed.

Taking advantage of that gap, Goubayashi cladding in golden fighting spirit flying kicked the hydra, knocking off one of its head. The cooperation play by the two people, while few in number, had already crushed 2 heads. The progress of the battle was unfavorable, however, it was by no means inferior.

“Even I am the same, I believe I'm well-bred!”

“If so, t's the difference in education.”

“Bullshit!!”

Even Nekomiya the snob couldn't talk back to Harao's words, and had no

choice but to run from place to place as before.

Ryuzaki felt sorry for Nekomiya but over there still hadn't been cornered to the point of requiring assistance. He decided to concentrate on the boy in front of him.

Same as usual, Kogane was a boy who made the worst choice possible at the last moment. It was an action came from his inherent timidity. Probably the remark he had said '*Suou is a good guy*' was in no way a lie. And he was only faithfully carrying out that Suou's instructions.

Things such as weighting Suou and themselves on a scale, he had never thought of it.

Kogane wasn't supposed to be the kind of man clever enough to be able to weighting two things on a scale. So far, he had been moving with the assumption that both sides of Suou and Ryuzaki could coexist but that had collapsed then.

"Kogane, stop attacking! You said that you want to apologize to Washio!"

"I, I said! But, but Washio has already died, didn't you s...!"

"That's right! So put your hands together in front of his altar!"

Ryuzaki failed to avoid Kogane's «*Wind Cutter*». Several scales were easily peeled off and blew away, blood scattered. With «*Perfect Dragonization*», his defensive ability would rise yet again, but that form would just frighten Kogane further, making him drew back.

Ryuzaki pinned down his shoulder and looked at Kogane. His expression naturally became tough as he endured the pain. And yet, he barely maintained his gentle smile so as not to make Kogane nervous.

"Ah, Ryu, Ryuzaki..."

Kogane, still with an about to cry face, stopped attacking for a moment.

"Ah, I, I, again..."

"Ahh, it's '*again*'. Kogane, so end this already."

To hurt my classmate.

"But, I, already, such a..."

"You should apologize."

Looking at his own hands, Kogane was frighten. Maybe he was aware he had repeated an irreparable sin once again. Perhaps here was thinking, he belonged to the blood clan camp, and if that blood clan had kill Washio, he would feel like he had become a traitor without know anything. And on top of that, by turning his attacks against Ryuzaki, he had completely lost the place where he belong.

“Kogane, I’ll tell you Washio’s last words.”

When Ryuzaki informed, Kogane twitched and his shoulders started trembling.

“After Utsurogi and others beat the Wight King, he may have been upset and told Kogane cruel things, but then, Washio———“

“Your friendship make-believe ends here.”

“———!?”

Ryuzaki reflexively turned around to the words that came from a completely different direction. And then, what reflected in his sight stiffened his body.

What there were several vampires wearing black armors. And surrounded by them, a vampire woman wearing sister clothing stood. The black armored were Pawns, and then the sister clothed woman was a named one in the information. It was understood that Nekomiya who sensed her presence, had her movements stiffened for a moment.

“A—Akeno-san...”

Kogane muttered. Akeno the Bishop. The one who personally took care of Washio. Kogane, who had also heard that information, turned obviously frighten eyes toward Akeno.

However, the appearance of Akeno before his eyes was subtly different from what he had heard from Akai and Rin. Akeno Miyabi. He heard that Akeno the Bishop was a woman who always had a too serious and fastidious look. Yet, the ‘Akeno’ in front of his eyes then, relaxed her mouth and floated a somewhat mysterious smile.

No, rather than such at thing, the problem is,

Ryuzaki confirmed the Pawns standing around Akeno. The number was 5. One of them had a face that seemed like he saw it somewhere before but he

couldn't recalled where was it.

5 Pawns and 1 Bishop. The different in war potential was hopeless. He had never thought that having Akai return to the branch school would bounce back to them in this way.

Goubayashi group's battle continued in the back. They had just crushed the 3rd head then. The hydra might be disposed of even if he left them alone. But what of the bunch in front of his eyes then?

"Akeno-san.... Did you, kill Washio?"

"Ahh, It appears that you've heard."

Still didn't destroy the smile on her lips, Akeno said.

"That gryphon was done in by me. I guess Suou was trying to keep it a secret from you, but there is no meaning in keeping silent anymore. You are already useless for the negotiating role anyway."

"Wha..."

With Akeno's words, Kogane floated an idiotic expression for a moment, but it instantly distorted into a look of strong emotions. The power of spirits dwelling in his body spun around, creating wind blades.

"How, how dare...!!"

Along with those words, Kogane shoot «*Wind Cutter*». The Pawns jumped out in front and tried to protect Akeno from the blade heading toward her. The blade of wind cut the black armor in two and severed the Pawn's left arm. Seeing the Pawn's arm rolling around, Akeno laughed.

"It seems I can't have any expectation for you as an obedient soldier. But if you've grown this much, there should be plenty enough value."

Immediately after, wave of black energy released from Akeno's both arms. It stretched straight to Kogane and restrained his body. Phase 2 «*Spirit Possession*» was canceled, he seemed to have fainted and his body that became limp was captured by the Pawns.

"Kogane—!"

Ryuzaki broke into a run but the remaining Pawns pinned him down from his

left and right. Akeno floated a scoffing smile and jerked her chin.

“Take him.”

“Yes.”

The Pawns, still holding Kogane’s both arms, spread red wings on their back and flew up. Ryuzaki raised his pair of eyes and glared at Akeno.

“What are you planning to do to Kogane, Bishop Akeno!”

“So you want to know, let’s take you as well.”

That said, Akeno again clad black energy on both arms. This too had been explained by Akai. This was a special spiritual energy called black crimson energy that only Bishop, Queen, and then the Pawns who wore the black armor could use.

He had no plan to be helplessly defeated like this. Still being held down by the Pawns from left and right, Ryuzaki tried to dragonize his whole body but the Pawns immediately released black crimson energy and obstructed his action.

“Guaa...!!”

Lightning-like energy crawled around his whole body. He had a sensation of strength coming out from his body.

“Dragonewt. Phase 2 Ability was «*Perfect Dragonization*». It’s not something so rare but I heard that the degree of power that can be draw out is sufficient.”

Akeno laughed. Continued after Kogane, she intended to take even himself. He wanted to resist this situation, but he couldn’t put strength in his body. As the minimal rebellious intent, he glared at Akeno, but she didn’t show any sign of caring about it and just radiated black crimson energy in the form of lightning.

“.....—!!”

Ryuzaki almost closed his eyes by reflex, but then a person shadow appeared before his eyes without any prior indication. That person, still putting his left arm behind his back, raised the Egyptian cross gripped in his right hand. An invisible semicircular barrier expanded and repelled the back lightning.

“Mu...?”

The faint smile on Akeno's face disappeared for an instant.

"Harao..."

Ryuzaki called his name in a weak voice. Despite flinching for a moment before the existence of the Pharaoh appeared in front of them, the Pawns launched an attack from behind. However, Harao disappeared again for a moment, and raised the ankh from a place some distance away. The Pawn's movement became a little dull.

It seemed that the even the paralysis ability that completely suspended the hydra's movement couldn't bind the Pawn. But striking at the instant when the movement became dull, Goubayashi fist sent the Pawn flying.

"Fu-un!!"

With a second shot, the second body struck against a tree trunk.

"Strange, black crimson energy is not effective to you bastards..."

"T's because I'm well-bred."

Harao puffed up his chest against Akeno's words. Nekomiya who was applying «*Shadow Heal*» to Ryuzaki had an amazed expression.

"That again..."

"Or possibly the difference in education."

When looking at it, the hydra already had all of its heads crushed, exposing just a big corpse. Fresh injuries were conspicuous on Goubayashi's body, Harao's bandages also frayed somewhat and his prided golden mask had a scratch on it. Probably, they had fought in quite an unreasonable way in order to save Ryuzaki. Thanks to that Ryuzaki was somehow safe.

However, Kogane is,

Besides, they could overcome the difference in war potential with these number was something too doubtful to say. Even at Phase 2, Goubayashi exceeded being a match for a Pawn, but it was unknown if he could go against a Bishop.

Probably Akeno also understood that fact. She didn't destroy that thin smile floated on her face.

How should they escape? It was doubtful whether Harao's instant movement

could carry others. Even if he could, at best, carrying Nekomiya alone would be the limit. Ryuzaki and Goubayashi had no choice but to escape by their own strength.

When Ryuzaki's thought was spinning around, two people shadows dropped down from the sky.

Kaminari Totoha's wings which accumulated lightning, ate the wind and steadily came closer to Suou's back. By having Kyousuke ride, she received the effect of «*Characteristics Amplification*». Physical specs greatly improved, Kaminari was closing the distance with the escaping Suou at unprecedented speed.

Perhaps Suou noticed them gaining on him, he turned toward inside the forest at once and dropped his altitude. Kaminari spoke in a voice mixed with bitterness.

"Ku, I can't follow this...!" [Notes]

"No, it's enough. Thank you, Kaminari."

Kyousuke looked at Suou descending into the forest, muttered.

«Totoha-chan, have you become okay with thunder?»

"I'm okay not! I was extremely scared!"

«Really, thanks!»

Kaminari's wings still cladded in blue lightning, making crackling sounds. Precisely because she, in her own way, had been enduring her fear and doing her best that they could catch up. Kyousuke's heart was getting proud at each of his classmate perseverance.

"Rin, let's go!"

«Yup!»

Kyousuke and Rin jumped off from Kaminari's back. Nose diving after Suou. While adjusting his position by blowing water from his back or elbows, he was exploring for the same drop point.

"Won't the cloth get torn if we blow water like this?"

«The cloth is part of my body, so it's OK OK."

That is to say, we look like wearing clothes but theoretically we're naked, isn't

it? That's not OK at all.

«Since 'naked is embarrassing' is a subjective problem, it's OK OK.»
“Is that so!?”
«Kyouzuke-kun also exposed your naked bones but I guess you wasn't embarrassed.»

I don't know if it's sophism or a sound argument, but it's quite hard to be convinced.

«Ah, Kyouzuke-kun! I saw Suou!»
“There's also Ryuzaki and others. Moreover, that is...”

Kyouzuke narrowed his eyes. That was Akeno. There were 2 Pawns in the surroundings. No, it was three. One person lost an arm and was standing a little behind.

With just the number of Pawns itself made this a splendid banquet. Even against the Pawn which is the lowest grade soldier, in 2nd year class 4, only Akai and Stream Cross in compressed state had scored a victory against them. And then, it depended on the level of what Goubayashi could do, but they cannot go without saying that two unhurt Pawns and one Bishop was harsh.

And when it became that even a Knight joined in.

“Rin! Let's blow it!”
«Alrighty!»

Spouting water from his back in one gulp, he accelerated the falling speed. Soon, Kyouzuke and Rin grappled with Suou from behind.

“Hey, you guys...!”
“Think to escape so easily!?”

Making sure to lock up the body of Suou, who raised a surprised voice, two people fell toward a slightly open spot in the forest. A thunderous roar shook the earth, clouds of dust raised. Trees crashed, **gyaa gyaa**, birds in the forest made noisy sounds and flew toward the sky.

Kyouzuke struck Suou's body into the ground and jumped aside. Glaring at Knight Suou in front, he took 2, 3 steps back in order to protect Ryuzaki and the others. Both arms naturally took a Jeet Kune Do stance.

“Utsurogi, is it...?”

Ryuzaki inquired from behind.

«Amazing, you instantly understand!!»

“It’s because the only one who takes a Bruce Lee stance in our class is Utsurogi.”

Ryuzaki wasn’t the only one behind him. Goubayashi, Harao, Nekomiya. Everyone was safe. Apparently, they seemed to have already finished exterminating the hydra. This seemed to be a more reliable lineup than he had thought. He couldn’t even imagine how Harao was fighting at all.

“Fumu, Phase 3?”

In contrast to the Pawns who revealed vigilance, Akeno put her hands on her mouth and laughed amusedly. Her attitude was strange compared to the time when they met at the church. Kyouzuke wrinkled his browns.

“Run away, Akeno...”

Raising his body from the ground, Suou, whose school uniform had become tattered, said.

“Fumu.”

“There are too many things to report to the King. Akeno, you take the Pawns along and quickly escape.”

“I see, that person seems quite good.”

Fuu, laughed Akeno, she spread red wings on her back. It felt like that smile floated on her mouth seem to have some implication, but Kyouzuke and the others didn’t understand to probe anymore than that.

“Escaping...!?”

“Oops!”

Suou came standing in Kyouzuke’s way as he tried to break into a run. He immediately liquefied and tried to pass through, but Suou cut his own artery with his claws, and blood gushed out. Suou blood instantly formed a wall and shutdown Kyouzuke and Rin’s body.

«This is the same as Akai-san's Bloody Corps!»

Rin shouted. Kyousuke also nodded. However, tricky movements by liquefaction was not the true value of this Extreme Cross. Kyousuke pulled back his fist and vigorously bashed the wall. The closed room made of blood was very easily destroyed, the blood box, unable to maintain its shape, collapsed, making a splashing sound.

"Please tell that guy I apologize! For being silent and not being able to play Tekken!"

Still putting his hands in his school uniform pockets, Suou shouted so to Akeno who was flying away.

It was the feeling of serving as rear guard. From that conduct, Suou probably didn't intend to return alive. He considered who could have been the one called '*that guy*' Suou had said. He couldn't find it among the names told by Akai. Kyousuke looked up into the sky but Akeno's figure had already disappeared. Suou had splendidly accomplished his role.

"Now then,"

Roughly scratching his head, Suou said.

"Shall we do this, Utsurogi. Well, I already got no method to win against you. But if you got carried away, I will instantly reverse it."

"....."

Kyousuke didn't utter a single word. He glared at Suou without breaking his Jeet Kune Do stance.

Ryuzaki and the others completely didn't cut in between Kyousuke and Suou's glare-off. They silently watched over this place.

«I don't want to say this so late in the game, however.»

Rin started muttering.

«Despite being able to care about your comrades, how can you do such cruel things to Washio-kun and Saa-chan?»

"Isn't that how yankee is?"

There was no timidity in Suou's words. Realizing that Kyousuke didn't come

attacking, he sighed.

“The Queen also did stupid things. No matter how one struggle, a kin can’t go against the King’s words. Hey Utsurogi, If it’s you who have shared the Queen’s blood, you will understand.”

Certainly, there was something Kyouzuke recalled when hearing Suou’s words. When fighting at the fortress line, an unidentified feelings welled up from the bottom of his heart. That was probably a ‘*command*’ to seal the Pawn’s mouth issued by Akai who hated leaking information to the enemy. If the same ‘*command*’ came down from the King to Suou or Akai, they wouldn’t be able to resist it.

In the royal palace, Akai had said ‘*Can you not order me?*’. He had said trivial words that couldn’t be thought of as a command but she was coming to embrace rejection toward things called ‘*command*’ and ‘*domination*’ to the point of being hypersensitive even against that.

“But well, if I can escape from that shitty domination of blood here it may not be bad. That’s the reason I’m going to fight you here and now.”

“I have no plan to help you perform an elaborate suicide.”

Kyouzuke said clearly.

“That’s right. But well, you gotta defeat me. Anyhow, see here, you don’t know when the king’s order will arrive, and we will be let free? Unlike the Queen, our locations is always known to the King.”

Even if he overlooked Suou here, he didn’t know when Suou might become the King’s vanguard and came attacking. And when that happened, Kyouzuke didn’t know if he could be in the state of Extreme Cross like this time. Keeping him alive was no different from letting a dangerous bomb take care of itself.

“Suou.”

Said Kyouzuke.

“What is it?”

“Thank you for being friends with Kogane.”

“Good grief.”

Suou floated a bitter smile. Kyouzuke pulled back his fist and took the stance

of Extreme Blow. Suou, still putting his hands in his school uniform's pockets, took a slouching posture and glared at Kyouusuke.

Kyouusuke kicked the ground, Suou prepared to counter attack.

It was only a moment until the two crossed and the game was decided.

Chapter 42: Toward the Eastern Sea

The battle was over. They decided to cremate Washio's remains. Kyouzuke took back from the chimera, properly stored in an urn and put inside the Buddhist altar. Kyouzuke too, attended the place that was possible to say the second funeral, and offered a silent prayer for Washio's happiness in the next world.

Even in a world of magic, in a world where undead monsters ran rampant, what gone will never come back. That great principle is absolute. Where is Washio's soul now on the path to the underworld? Is there also the concept of circle of transmigration in this world? Once, Selena has told of the existence of other-worlders called 'reincarnators'. So will Washio's soul really be born as something else?

When asked Goubayashi about this, he said:

«The concept of salvation for souls after death, is for the sake of the living to be independent from fear of death and look ahead. Rather than clinging to the fantasy that the death may revive, it is better to think that such things won't happen from the start.»

It was a coldhearted tale, words one wouldn't think belonged to a religionist. But those were words of Goubayashi Genshuu, a friend of Utsurogi Kyouzuke. Kyouzuke nodded contentedly.

There was another soul Kyouzuke had to pray for.

In a place some distance away from the old castle was a small hill. Though a hill, it wasn't a place that could be said to have good outlook due to the dense trees, same as the ruins of the royal capital. But Kyouzuke had chosen it as the burial place for Suou Takafumi.

It took but an instant to reach a conclusion with him. Whether he didn't have any method to defend against Extreme Blow, or didn't care to defend in the first place, was unknown. But splashing blood from his chest, Knight Suou collapsed. Even a vampire with that excellent physical ability and regeneration would die if his heart was crushed. This was something taught by Akai.

Kyousuke simply had no leeway to take him into consideration. There was the activity limit as told by Akai. If unskillfully eased up and Extreme Cross be canceled, Kyousuke would then be unable to EX-combine for a long time. And then, there was no guarantee that Suou wouldn't attack Kyousuke and the others who lost their definite advantage.

Suou had ridiculed the fate of blood of him who born as a blood kin as «*shitty*», but seeing as he did volunteer to be the rearguard for Akeno's escape, he should have some sense of belonging. He didn't do anything like saying something about where Akeno or Kogane could have headed to.

That was something Kyousuke couldn't do anything about. It would be a lie to say that it wasn't vexing. He had never thought that he himself would embrace shounen manga-like feelings such as «*If only we meet under different circumstances*».

Suou's burial, compared to Washio's, was fairly modest. Ryuzaki, Goubayashi, Harao, Nekomiya who witnessed that battle. In addition to Akai, Sakuma, as well as Rin and Akira. 8 people — including Kyousuke, 9 people — gathered the remains of him who disappeared like ashes.

For many classmates, Suou was still an enemy. A monster who desecrated Washio's death, led the chimera to attack the branch school, tried to kidnap Sakuma and gave her grief. To that Suou's burial, he was hesitating a little when inviting other classmates, but Goubayashi and the others nodded.

"Then, we will return to exploring the old castle again."

After finishing his silent prayer, Ryuzaki said so.

"As said by Kuremori, the engine section seemed to have received damage when the branch school was shaken by Suou's attack, and the repair will take about 1 day."

"I see, so exploring the old castle in the meantime?"

"It seems that they have been using it as a hideout for a suitably long time. Various things were discovered."

They would have intended to keep it as the base for invasion, similar to the aforementioned dungeon, the Promised Cemetery. The material that was useful for the branch school's renovation had also been found.

And a lot of entertainment, beginning with tabletop games such as chess or playing cards, and when the power generator and video game were found, the classmates were greatly excited. Kyousuke, who finally understood the meaning of the words Suou last said to Akeno, felt just a little distressed.

Probably judging that anymore than this wouldn't be things to say in front of a grave, Ryuzaki, accompanied by Goubayashi and Nekomiya, went down the hill. Harao yawned greatly.

"I shalt go back to the branch school and return to sleep..."

"Ahh, Harao too, good work. Thank you for everything this time."

"Protecting mine friends is also an obligation of Harao's.... No one shalt disturb the sleep of Harao..."

So said Harao and disappeared with instant movement.

"His character is as strong as ever..."

Rin muttered. All those remained nodded silently.

"Anyway, case closed with this. Everything resolved, is difficult to say though."

"Ahh, It's not a situation to be openly delighted, but one short-term problem is resolved."

In response to Akira's words, Kyousuke looked at his own arms. His bones felt strangely weaker compared to before. It was the depletion of '*the power of blood*' due to prolonged usage of Phase 3 ability. Akai had referred to this as «*blood withered*». The power of blood seemed to return with the passage of time but it also meant that Extreme Cross wasn't something that could be used so unreservedly. It seemed not to be case if Akai was to constantly supply him with blood, but Kyousuke's attitude regarding that was negative.

Here in this place were Rin, Akira, Sakuma, Akai. Kyousuke turned around to the four and bowed his head another time.

"I'm sorry for the various troubles this time. That we could win was thanks to everyone."

"Y-yeah..."

“No need for that kind of things.”

Beside Sakuma who was fidgeting, Akai said readily.

“I’m telling you just in case Utsurogi, don’t get carry away because you got to Phase 3. Because *‘you having my blood’* has already been leaked.”

“Uu...”

Kyousuke winced just a little at Akai’s words. *‘So it’s as expected?’* was his thought.

Akai had been concealing her power all for the sake of not letting the King sense her location. He didn’t how many conditions were necessary for the King to give his command to a kin. However, Akai couldn’t escape from that domination, so it was equal to Kyousuke also being under the King’s domination.

Kyousuke reached Phase 3. Namely speaking, it indicated the fact that he had turned into Akai’s kin. Kyousuke too, had become unable to refuse the King’s order.

“As for that, we have no choice but to follow it up by ourselves. Isn’t that right? Akai.”

“Nn, well yes.”

There was some kind of implication in Akira’s words.

“Regarding future policies, we need to discuss again with Ryuzaki and the others.”

“Future policies?”

“About things like Kogane-kun, or Kaoruko-chan,”

As Kyousuke tilted his head, Rin put out her understanding.

“And, Akai-san’s objective, isn’t it?”

“.....”

Akai, still with arms crossed, closed her eyes. Both Rin and Akira probably had noticed *‘that’*. Akai’s goal had never been *‘returning to their world’* as raised by Ryuzaki.

However, that was clearly not a topic to be said in front of a grave. Akai took a breath and turned her back to Kyousuke and the others.

“Then, I’m going back to the branch school.”

“Ah, me too, me too—! I’m going back too! Let’s go too Hino-kun!”

“No problem, but.... Ahh, you’re right.”

Like following after Akai, Rin and Akira went down the hill. The one surprised was Sakuma.

“Eh, huh, hey ... wait...”

Without being able to chase after the three who left hurriedly, she revealed her dismay. Kyousuke sigh — — -less body was the same as usual, but let’s go with the feeling of sighing for the time being. Those guys were being unnecessarily tactful.

At the branch school, just before chasing after Suou, Akira had told him to say the same words said to Akira to Sakuma as well. It appeared that Kyousuke, who kept missing the chances for all kind of reasons, should say it on this occasion.

“U—Utsurogi-kun...”

While strangely fidgeting, Sakuma said. Strange enough, he felt that it had been a long time since he saw this side of her.

Since Sakuma had been steeling herself continuously for quite a while here, it probably couldn’t be help. There was hardly any chances to talk to Kyousuke. As one who was able to state her opinions to Akai, she was entrusted the position like the representative of the girls in the class, and then within a period of less than a few days, she had to rack her brain over the matters of Washio’s death and Akai’s *coming out* in succession.

That the class was united, as well as Akai and himself being safe like this was entirely thanks to her efforts.

“Let’s go downhill for the time being.”

“Yeah, you’re right...”

This forest where human hands hadn’t touched in eons seemed like they could get lost in if they were careless.

“...Utsurogi-kun, do you remember the first time we met in the library?”

Was it because the conversation got stuck, Sakuma suddenly started such a story.

“Ahh, I returned a borrowed book to Sakuma. It was ‘*Witch of the Black Forest*’, I think.”

“Yup. This forest is very similar to the forest in that book, isn’t it?”

“Because it’s ‘*Schwarzwald*’. It’s quite eerie compared to the image of Japanese forests.”

“I know, right? The trees in this area are all conifers.”

Thinking about it, that he was conversing with Sakuma like this was incredibly nostalgic. It had been more than one and a half month since they came to this world. Very soon, it would be two months. Things like talking about the contents of a book read in old times was surely the first time since the library. Sakuma, when talking about such stories, showed a very merry expression. *Rather than the tense expression these days, this face seems closer to her character*, he thought.

“Sakuma,”

“What is it?”

“I said this earlier, but it’s thanks to Sakuma(s) that we were able to win this time. Thank you.”

Sakuma was amazed by the words being told.

“I have also been regularly helped by Sakuma...”

“That, are you saying that to everyone?” [Notes]

“Ehh!?”

Since an unexpected response came back, Kyousuke resolutely fell forward, rolling on the slope.

“U—Utsurogi-kun!?”

“E—everyone, I mean.... I said something similar to Akira before.”

“Ah, really.... Hino-kun...”

While giving a hand to Kyousuke who spoke honestly as he raised his body, Sakuma was making a sullen face.

“Utsurogi-kun.”

“Wh—what is it?”

“I will do my best not to lose to Himemizu-san.”

“...That’s not something to say to the person themselves, is it?”

Kyousuke felt like sweats were breaking out from his whole body. Naturally, he was all bones with no sweat gland.

He wasn't going to be dimwitted to the point of not understanding what Sakuma was saying. But it also meant that he wasn't mature enough to be capable of catching it head on. What he felt was that he had thoroughly averted his gaze from his inside as well as the emotions in his surroundings, just to have the debt come back biting him all at once.

Such conversation was bad for his heart (not there), his stomach (didn't exist) hurt.

"Sakuma."

"Yup."

"D—do your best...!!"

"That's not something to say to the person themselves, was it?"

It was just that he didn't know exactly what to say beside that.

While going downhill, Sakuma said '*Of course, I'm going to do my best not to lose to Hino-kun too*', and Kyousuke ended up rolling down the slope again.

That evening, Kyousuke and the others gathered in the captain's room of the branch school. The lineup was mostly unchanged from the ones who had participated in Suou's burial during the day. Removed Nekomiya and Harao from that and added Inugami.

Because of the fact that the repair of the branch school would end within the night, they had decided to discuss the future policies once again.

As a result of exploring the old castle, various documents that appeared to be left by Akeno were discovered. One of them was a report called «*Transference Denaturation Gate Summary*». Its contents were completely incomprehensible to Kyousuke and the others, but with Akai's explanation, they understood that it was a report concerning the Gate that simultaneously transferred people to the different world and degenerated their constitution to that of monsters. There was plenty value as documents to hand over to '*Master Majina*', sage of the eastern forest.

Other than that, they had also discovered documents on viruses that caused human body to transform into ghouls. In Selena's story, ghouls had been discovered around 10 years ago, in Akai's story, the blood clan made the

different world migration plan around 3 years ago, coupled with the fact that the time flow difference of this world and the former world was close to 3 times, they understood that it was consistent time-wise.

“Well now, it’s regarding the future, however,”

Ryuzaki spread a map on the desk. It was a big map describing this continent. The continent’s ground, although considerably misshapen, spread in a form of crescent moon roughly during its last quarter. However, on the map, details were only densely drawn on some areas from the center to four cardinal directions, the forest where the branch school was currently staying was completely dyed in grey.

“According to Selena-san’s story, there was a large-scale aggression in this world by a foreign enemy hundreds of years ago, so it seems that the activity sphere of humanity has greatly shrink. The map of this continent also didn’t seem accurate. We were told that it wasn’t actually crescent-shaped but should be wider.”

“The wasteland we first transferred to was mostly untouched by humans, wasn’t it?”

Rin nodded at Ryuzaki’s words.

“Just that the activity sphere of humanity ——— or rather, the empire’s activity range is narrow also means that if we properly detour, it will end without having to get into trouble with them. And that’s the reason for the detour we are taking now.”

Greatly go south from Selena’s country and leave from the domain perceptible to the Empire. Continue going east as is, they would come out into the vast ocean. On the South side of the empire, there existed land called the New Continent or maritime countries consisting of small islands. Even the Empire’s hands mostly didn’t reach these parts, and the only people who would visit the New Continent were just oddball adventurers or so.

The initial plan was to visit the sage living in the eastern forest while passing through this sea and the New Continent. All present didn’t give any objection to that.

“There are two problems. First, if we go out to sea, it will become impossible

to link up with Kaoruko, however...”

Ryuzaki raised his face to see that Akai and Sakuma frowning. He had heard that these two had a long relationship with Kaoruko. But Goubayashi said:

“I have talked about the rendezvous in the East. I don’t know where in this gulf area but if there’s a span with open field of vision, she should be waiting there.”

“Then, once we get to the sea, first things first is to look for Kaoruko...”

“Here, looking at this map, there were several rivers pouring into the sea, however,”

Peering into the map, Rin said.

“In case of not moving from the spot, won’t she be in the vicinity of this river? If it’s the sea, there’s no fresh water so it’s unsuitable for long-term stay, right?”
“That’s certainly true...”

Ryuzaki checked several rivers flowing from west to east.

“The second problem is that leaving from the Empire’s sphere of influence may very well be covered in the blood clan’s sphere of influence.”

Everyone nodded with a frown. It was because they anticipated this to some extent.

Like in this ruined kingdom, there was the possibility that the blood clan had established bases in places difficult for the Empire – the main force of humanity – to perceive. From the story told by Selena’s mother, Her Majesty the Queen, it seemed that skirmishes had already started in various places, but if it leaked out that the students scheduled to be incorporated as war potential, and the Queen had betrayed them, there was the possibility that they would temporarily cease the conflict and withdraw outside the Empire’s sphere of influence.

Frankly, it was difficult to think that the students themselves have that much power, but that feelings originated from the fact that there were few students who awoke to their ability. 40 students with power comparable to the Pawns. Even when removing Akai and Inugami, 38 students. And if they reach Phase 3, the Pawns wouldn’t even be their opponents. Everyone of them would have

more than enough power to be included as the core of war potential.

Anyway, there was also such circumstances, and the possibility of the withdrawn blood clan establishing bases on the branch school's route after this couldn't be denied. They could avoid conflict with the Empire, but it was also true that the journey would never be an enjoyable one.

"Well, this has good and bad aspects as well. Like searching for Kogane."
"Ahh."

Kyousuke nodded to Ryuzaki's words. Presently, the ones most motivated to rescue Kogane in the class were these two.

"Besides that."

Kyousuke interrupted Ryuzaki who tried to continue to say something, and opened his mouth.

"I think everyone here is already aware, but anyway, we can't go without fighting those guys."

All present sunk into silent at those words, and subsequently looked at Akai. Akai, with her arms crossed, sighed a little.

"Well, at least, that's how it to for me."
"There should be guys in the class who are vaguely aware as well. That is, just '*return to being human, go back to our world*' won't solve the fundamental problem."

Akira supplemented Kyousuke's words.

The blood clan held a technique to move between different worlds freely to a certain extent. It was easy to imagine from some documents and items left behind in the old castle. Almost without seeing any interruption, they had seized what were clearly letters exchange of here and that world, most recently released manga of the former world, back issues of weekly magazine, *etc.* That is to say, the blood clan would pursue them even if they were to return to the former world. Many of the classmates might be overlooked but the problem was Akai. One couldn't promise peace to the traitorous her even in the case she went back to the former world. It wouldn't be Akai not to understand that.

Assuming it was her intention to oppose the King from the start, then her ultimate goal regarding this different world transference wasn't to return to the former world.

It was rebellion against the vampire king who named himself as '*Red Moon King*'.

"There is no point in keeping it a secret from those in this place, but,"

Again, Akai sighed and said.

"I also had my words out in the organization of this 2nd year class 4."

"Akai?"

"First, the one who said to put Inugami in, was me."

Inugami Hibiki, who was crossing her arms and leaning her back on the wall some distance away from them, raised her face.

Akai, who had already grasped the information that Inugami was a survivor of the werewolves destroyed by the blood clan, feigned ignorance and proposed to have Inugami put into the class. Inugami who wasn't human from the start didn't turn into a monster even if she pass through the Transference Denaturation Gate. And her hostility against the blood clan had existed from the start.

Other names Akai had raised were Ryuzaki and Goubayashi. If there were those guys, Akai thought that even without her taking command of the class, they would put the class together. Other than them, there were some students who wouldn't be included in the class without her recommendation, Akai said.

In short, they had been rolled up in this *trip* completely because of Akai's convenience.

"That is, I have nothing to say."

Smiling bitterly, Ryuzaki scratched his head. Akai made a surprised face.

"You're surely not getting angry."

"If you want me to get angry, I will, but.... Hey, Utsurogi."

"Eh, you're dragging me into this?"

Kyousuke reflexively raised his face. He thought for a short while, and finally said:

“No, well, nothing can be done even if we get angry, Akai’s decision wasn’t wrong.”

At least, the class was currently united thanks to Ryuzaki. While it’s true that Akai was charismatic, just her alone wouldn’t be able to pull the students together so neatly like this.

It was an unfortunate story for Ryuzaki and Goubayashi, but for Kyouzuke, this situation was one to say that he was glad Ryuzaki got rolled up in. Without him, the class would have collapsed in an earlier stage and surely a lot more death would’ve come out.

“...Are you two idiots?”

“Ahh, Ryuzaki is an idiot.”

“Kyouzuke is really stupid too.”

“...Why are you two saying that so proudly?”

Goubayashi and Akira nodded with self-satisfied look, then retorted Akai, mystified.

“At – these – times, Akai-san. You should say «*Thank you*».”

“Uu...”

At Rin’s words, Akai choke on her words a little. Her gaze wandered in the air for a while, but soon she sighed resignedly and said:

“Th–thank you...”

“*Hyyu*!!”

As Rin made a heart mark with her whole body and cheered, Kyouzuke gave her a forehead flick, though he didn’t exactly knew where her forehead was.

“There are also those I didn’t want to put in the class but were put in. Like Sachi or Kaoru.”

“Asuka-chan...”

“That, could it have been that you’re suspected of rebellion?”

“Perhaps, or perhaps it was an unnecessary care called ‘*it will be less lonely to have longtime friends together*’.”

Anyway, what important was that Akai faced this *trip* while having a clear defiance against the King. Probably, she had taken it as the last chance to

escape from the King's domination, no doubt. For that reason, she had been making careful preparation since 3 years ago.

Akai wouldn't become free unless the King was killed. However, it seemed that she still had some hesitation to make her classmates go along with that. Was it because of the sentiment budded inside her, or possibly a completely different reason, was unknown.

"Well, I'll go a long with you."

Said Kyouzuke.

"I have to save Kogane, and I have become a blood kin as well, so either way, it's absolutely necessary to bring down those guys."

"If Kyouzuke do it, I'm going to do it too."

"Me too. Because it's absolutely dangerous with just these 2."

Rin and Akira also followed.

"I will also help you. Asuka-chan."

Sakuma as well, put her hand on her chest and nodded.

"I want to consider our classmates' safe return the maximum priority."

Ryuzaki glanced at Goubayashi and said. Goubayashi, still crossed his arms, nodded.

"Just, we have already brought down several members of the blood clan, so thinking about the hereafter, I don't know if it's safe even after we return. Because even Asuka, Utsurogi and the others are friends from our class, let's consider in the direction of helping out."

"No objection."

The gaze of everyone turned toward Inugami who had remained silent and didn't join the conversation so far. **Fun**, Inugami snorted.

"Whatever is fine, as long as the vampires I don't like are beaten up."

For the present, it was unanimous in this place. As a future policy, 2nd year class 4 would be forced to fight against the blood clan.

The problem was that this fact was something difficult for many classmates to concur. If said as vengeance for Washio, part of the students might approve,

but they didn't want to use the deceased's name for that sake. Since it was a decision accompanied by danger, they wouldn't be able force it on the unwilling students.

Rather, it might be indispensable to cooperate with Selena and the human forces. Thinking of the Empire's policies, it might be difficult for the monster corps called 2nd year class 4 to cooperate with them, but it was necessary to think that over again.

"There's a mountain of homework..."

When Ryuzaki muttered so, Kyousuke unintentionally burst into laughter.

"What, what's the matter? Utsurogi."

"No, just, I think you said that every-time..."

"It's true. It's really an inexhaustible thing."

Ryuzaki smiled bitterly at Kyousuke's words and nodded.

Exactly around here, the broadcast inside the ship announced that dinner had been deliciously made. All present decided to end the secret meeting about future policies and come out from the captain room.

Although the situation had become considerably clear thanks to Akai's confession, but things unknown were as yet many.

After all, what exactly was the reason the Red Moon King didn't plan a simple different world migration but a different world invasion? Akai had said that the King with high pride couldn't endure living quietly in the shadow but was that truly the only reason? There was no way to know even if thinking about it.

"Kyo-suke-kun!"

From behind, Rin talked to Kyousuke who was pondering while walking in the corridor. While matching her pace, they had completely lagged behind the other members.

"Nn, ahh. What is it?"

"Don't just think about only troublesome things as usual."

"You're right. It's like my nature. After all, many things have happened but things like this remains unchanged."

In the end, if one was to speak if there's any dramatic changes within himself

after going through Extreme Cross, there was no such things. As usual, he himself felt that he had no contents, and the parts that relied on others for his sense of values didn't change. He just vaguely came to think that *'even that me isn't bad, is it?'*.

“Ne—, Kyousuke-kun. Although it's something in the image when we used Extreme Cross.”

“Uu...”

Kyousuke abruptly stopped his feet. In the image. So to speak, things in the dream.

Not that he didn't remember what had happened. For Kyousuke who had absolutely zero experience on that kind of things, even just that was an extreme memory. It was an Extreme Dream. Just mentioning that story alone made things he had been seriously considering so far completely flew out the window.

“Once we returned to our human form, let's do more. Let's do it properly.”
“.....!?”

No helping it. That's what they called puberty.
Even while suffering from things such as his contents being empty or very shallow, Utsurogi Kyousuke was still a healthy high-school boy. He was all but bones now though.

“More, properly ... that is to say..., what kind of things?”
“Ah yeah, I can't say it here.”

The formless girl – Himemizu Rin – informed in a teasing tone, and leaving behind the standing still Kyousuke, crawled in the corridor. Her pace faster than usual, perhaps, she might have been skipping.

———
—————
—————

Still unable to believe in the entirety of the battle unfolded in front of her eyes, Remy, with strength came out from her waist, shrunk back.

Remy was a member of the Continental Southern Commerce Guild. She had been trading between various southern maritime countries as part of the marine caravan. There was a violent storm the other day, and the convoy had run aground, even the only remaining ship of Remy was washed up to a remote beach on the West side.

While other members were repairing the ship, Remy went gathering her companions of the other ships and commodities that were washed ashore. And in the middle of it, she received an attack from the fishmen. There were 3 kinds of fishman confirmed in the southern sea of the continent, merman, sahaagin, gillman, and the tribe friendly to humanity was the merman alone. The ones who attacked Remy were sahaagins.

There was no sign of humans in the surroundings, this place was far from the ship that her companions of the convoy was repairing. Remy was prepared for death.

At that time, the one who dashingly rushed to challenge the sahaagins' attack was a different flock of monsters.

That corps – mainly composed of small-type monsters like imps – dispatched the sahaagins in the blink of an eyes, and the sahaagins themselves hurriedly went back to the sea.

Remy hesitated whether should she say thanks for being rescued or should she run away. While hesitating, the leader of the flock walked up to Remy.

“Young lady, is there no injuries?”

“Eh, ah ... yes.”

Because it was words more amiable and intellectual than she thought, Remy felt completely anticlimactic.

“Really, that’s good then.”

Saying so, the monster smiled sweetly. The smile, illuminated by moonlight, was very beautiful.

“I want to ask but, I wonder if this is a sea, or else a very big lake?”

“Ah, no, umm, it’s the sea.”

“The sea.... I can’t go anymore east than this, is it?”

“Yes. I think there’s a human town if you go all the way north along the coast.”

The monster, put its hands on his chin, 'I see...', started thinking, then suddenly raised its face.

"Think?"

"Ah, no.... Because we have also been shipwrecked..."

"Ah..."

"Perhaps, there is also the possibility of this being an unpopulated island..."

"That's not it. We came all the way from northwest, but this should be land adjoining the continent."

That said, the monster gazed at the night sea. The night sea illuminated only by starlight was ominous as if it would swallow all things. Talking with a flock of amicable monsters like this was the first experience even in Remy short merchant life. *The heck are they from, where are they going after this?* She wondered.

Suddenly, Remy thought of something and asked the monster leader:

"Uhm, I have a small request, but..."

"I wonder what?"

"Could you please escort our caravan...?"

Of course, I will thank you. She said. *As a merchant.*

The caravan had been hiring adventurers as escorts, but the request of escorting ships coming and going between the maritime countries and the continent seemed to be boring for many of them, it was a job that had bad reputation in the Adventurer Guild. No matter how much request reward was raised, being able to hire high-quality escorts was rare. In fact, most of the hired adventurers were washed away in the storm the other day.

"I don't really mind, but,"

The monster crossed its arms, and showed a little hesitating face.

"I have a plan to meet up here for a little while. Just that, I don't know if I can keep associating with you, if the one I'm waiting for come."

"Th—there's no problem even in that case. Sahagin also seems to come out around these parts, so even just until the ship is fixed..."

"Fuun..."

As it was, the monster put its hand on its chin, softly caressing its own lips. It was an awfully amorous gesture.

“Well, that’s fine. There’s nothing to do while waiting for my companion anyway.”

“Really!?”

Remy’s face brightened. Although a monster, the other party appeared to be trustworthy, so it was cheap if it could defend her safety.

“Ah, I’m Remy. I belong to the marine caravan of the Continental Southern Commerce Guild! Umm, Oniisan, you are?”

“Oniisan...”

The monster plainly grimaced for an instant, but shortly sighed «*Fuu—*».

“Well, it’s fine. I stared down my inner self, so it can’t be help if it looks that way, isn’t it...”

“Eh, umm...”

Perhaps, I said something bad? She was wondering.

However, that monster — — — the incubus, without any appearance of caring about it, floated a gentle smile and presented its right hand.

“I’m Kaoru. Okama Kaoru. Remy, shall we get to business immediately?”

Dried Teacher Katsubushi - Lesson 03: You're a Gentle Child, Akai!

"Really, Washio..."

When receiving the report, a heavy atmosphere looms in the kitchen.

After leaving the base and started traveling, our location has been moved to the kitchen of the land warship referred to as '*heavy cruiser branch school*'. I'm not really familiar with the navy warships of old Japan, but as I see it, this kitchen seems to have everything necessary at the ready. Sugiura seems to be making meals with cheerful appearance these days.

However, the voice of Sugiura who is making that report isn't the usual lively one. With her face looking down, what kind of expression she's making isn't visible to me.

My name is Katsubushi Dashihiko. Formerly the homeroom teacher of Municipal Jindai High-school 2nd year class 4, now just a dried bonito. It doesn't matter even if you laugh at me, but allow me to say my explanation and justification some other time. Right now I'm a little beaten as expected.

The report I received is that one of my students, Washio Kouta has died. The voice of Sugiura, who wasn't that close to Washio, has a sinking feeling to it, and Honno-san, who probably has never exchange even a single word with him, is lost for words as well.

The one who did Washio in is the gang of the red winged devil whom I have faintly know as hostile since before. Namely speaking, they're the Blood of Red Moon. We tried to explore the ruins that once was a residential area visible in this mountainous region, but then we encountered those guys. Washio who became a decoy in order to let Utsurogi and Himemizu escape has died then. A strong sense of helplessness and loss dominates my body. This is incomparable to the time when Kogane was kidnapped. Again, I couldn't do anything when my students was in a crisis, I couldn't save Washio.

However, I can't afford to either mope around or go rotting like last time. Because the ones who feel painful aren't just me alone.

“Sugiura, are you OK?”

When I called out, she raised her face in surprise.

That’s right. The ones who feel painful aren’t just me alone. The realistic problem called the ‘*death*’ of a classmate. The children of 2nd year class 4 who have more than 10 years gap with me in terms of life experience will find this exceedingly difficult to overcome alone.

Those who died will never return. There should be no student who doesn’t know this fact, but then, just how many students truly understand its significance? However, in contrast to a single deceased, those alive are many. Those who survived should be able to join hands and look forward to the future. I think that what Sugiura and the students need is that kind of mental attitude.

“Yup.... I’m, not okay. It’s a little painful.”

There’s no spirit in Sugiura’s look as she said so.

“Sugiura-san...”

Honno-san, who has an exclusive bookshelf prepared, also calls out worriedly. I clear my throat a little.

“That’s right. It’s painful.... But the ones in pain aren’t just you alone.”

“Be patience because everyone is in pain?”

“No no, it’s the opposite. Because everyone is in pain, go and talk to various people, share the pain.”

Even if you mope around, even if you worry, your feelings will just sink even deeper.

Sugiura is brooding with a gloomy face. In the galley, there are chopped vegetables on the cutting board. While she was preparing dinner, the students were gathered by the broadcast inside the ship, and then Washio’s death was made known. Since she came back, Sugiura hasn’t continued her cooking at all. My vocabulary is too lacking to get Sugiura to recover here. In addition, talking together with a close friend about the deceased can be much more comforting to one’s heart than listening to the bigoted opinion of an adult. That’s what I’m recommending.

“...Yeah, I understand.”

Sugiura finally says so and nods.

“I will try talking to Hanazono. Sorry, I may not return for a while.”

“Don’t worry about it.”

Sugiura goes out of the kitchen with lifeless footsteps. Her octopus legs have none of its usual spirit.

“...Being a teacher is also a very difficult standpoint.”

Honno-san says so to me in a gentle tone.

“Because I’m an adult. Being an adult is painful.”

Even when I’m sad, I have to keep up cool appearance. This is what I learned from my students just the other day.

In the galley that has become deathly silent, I recall about Washio. Washio was in the basketball club. Since I heard that he was in the soccer club in middle school, it doesn’t mean that he’s the type of character to devote to a single sport. In fact, he has a flaw of being easily distracted and everything he did doesn’t last long.

That Washio came to me for consultation just one, saying that there’s a person he likes so he wants to make her fall no matter what. Frankly, I’ve only had an older girlfriend once when I was a college student (we broke up half a year after finding employment), my love experience isn’t exactly abundance so I struggled quite a bit. But as an adult, I told him the most plausible thing «*Then show your cool side by devote yourself to one thing*».

It was half a year later that Washio snatched away a regular position in the basket ball club. He seemed to have been rejected by the partner in mind though.

That Washio has died. I can’t hear that slick tone of his anymore.

Again, I feel a very difficult to get rid of sense of loss.

After a little while, Sugiura returns. It is difficult to say her spirit has returned, but some vitality is returning to her smile.

Sugiura talked to Hanazono and seems to have decided to do what they

themselves can do. Hanazono says that she will grow the carrots Washio likes, Sugiura says that she will cook those carrots. I guess the girls feel like doing a memorial service for the deceased. That's good. I respect that.

I told Sugiura to bring any student who is still hurt and can't recover to my place. Well, in the end Sugiura didn't bring any students to my place. I'm very lonely.

Apart from that though, Ryuzaki brings along a surprising students to my place that night.

It's Goubayashi. I'm stunned. My mouth would be agape if I still have it. At any rate, since this guy is disappeared a month ago, he is one of the students we have no contact with at all. There should have been Okama accompanying him but it seems they got separated midway through.

Goubayashi bowed to me, *«I'm sorry to have made you worry»*, he said. He's a serious guy as usual.

"Well, it's fine as long as you're healthy."

"Sensei also seems to be healthy."

"...What are you looking at to be thinking so..."

The topic naturally shifted from there to the story of Washio's death.

It seems that the students have decided among themselves to perform Washio's funeral. This too, is a good thing. It is important to face death. I also want to attend if possible, but it's impossible for a dried bonito. Since they're going carry the Buddhist altar to the dining room after the funeral ends, I decided to offer my flaked bonito there.

"Sensei's flaked bonito, is it?..."

Goubayashi's face is grim.

"Wha—what. Is it bad? No, it's not bad. You're going to get good soup stock, since it's my flaked bonito."

"No.... It's because I have never heard of anyone who offer dried bonito..."

"Really, is fruit still better as expected.... Washio certainly did like carrots."

"Yes, well..."

Well, Goubayashi is the son of a temple. He should be more knowledgeable

than someone like me. I will obediently follow what he said here.

“Katsubushi-sensei.”

The reason Ryuzaki brought Goubayashi along seems to be for a light greeting. After exchanging a few conversations with Goubayashi, he comes out from the kitchen. But as he goes out, he suddenly looks back.

“Nn, what’s wrong?”

“Looking from sensei’s perspective, what do you think of the class right now?”

That is a surprising question.

“But sensei has no eyes...”

“Then there’s no problem even if you feel. For me, I can’t help but feel stuck about this mass different world transference itself.”

“Fumu...”

It’s unusual for this guy Goubayashi to throw such a direct question at me like this. It’s because this guy’s a not-troublesome student who can settle most problem by himself. Thanks to that, his reputation is very good among the teachers, but I’m a little unsatisfied as his homeroom teacher though.

But generally, whenever this prudent boy (yes, I’m a little hesitant in saying this, but Goubayashi is a boy) ask a question, then in many case, the path to the answer will be a treacherous one. I’m a teacher, but to be frank, I’m not really that smart.

“In the dungeon we first transferred to, there are too many supplies for daily necessities. That’s not all. As I heard from Ryuzaki, the main engine of this heavy cruiser branch school is also something discovered in the dungeon.”

“You mean the situation is too convenient?”

“Yes. To be honest, I feel something quite artificial.”

But what is the relationship between that and whether do I feel anything about the class?

Thinking so, I sharply raise my face. No, I have no face. **Clanking**, my entire body move.

“Perhaps, Goubayashi, you’re saying that there’s someone among the students who took part in this transference incident?”

“It’s only a possibility to the last.”

So he says. I’m troubled.

This means that Goubayashi is asking «*Do you feel anything in the class?*», but ever since I reincarnated as a dried bonito, I have only ever secluded myself inside the kitchen all the time. There’s no way I can see such a thing. What I know is only things such as how many suction cups are there on Sugiura’s octopus legs. I counted since I’m free, but this may possibly be sexual harassment so let’s keep my mouth shut.

“Well, anyway Goubayashi, looking from me, there’s nothing in particular.”
“Is that so? Sorry to have asked a strange question.”

Saying that much, Goubayashi comes out from the kitchen. In exchange, Sugiura returns, carrying along a large amount of carrots.

“I’m back, sensei. Why was Goubayashi-kun here?”
“We’re talking about how there may be a student who participated in our transference incident.”

As I says so, Sugiura’s eyes round in wonder.

“Ehh, really?”
“It’s only a possibility to the last. Right? Honno-san.”
“Eh, yes. That’s right, isn’t it...”

Honno-san hesitates a little bit then seriously nods. I wonder if she is affected by Goubayashi’s impact.

“Well, anyway Sugiura. If there’s such a student, bring them to me. There’s no doubt that they must be suffering alone.”
“No way, sensei. Even if there’s such a child, there’s no way I can find them.”
“There’s that too, isn’t it.”

Ahahahahaha, a peaceful laughter echos in the kitchen.

However, it is but a few hours later that Sugiura brings along such a student.

“...Akai, could you please say that again?”
“Like I said,”

Akai Asuka's face shows a little irritation as she is speaking.

"The transference incident this time is my fault, I said."

Saying so, Akai scratches her head. Scratching such long hair in the kitchen and strands of hair would fall, hygienically speaking, it's not okay at all, but I have no mental composure just to caution her about that. When looking toward Sugiura, as expected, she too is choking on words.

When Sugiura brought Akai, it was after dinner. As I'm told, after the meal, this girl unusually remained alone in the dining room while making a sullen face. Normally, Sugiura would just look from a distance, but this time only is different. *«If there's a student who seems to be suffering from something, bring them to me!»,* It's because of what I said that she half-forcibly brought the unwilling Akai to the Kitchen.

As soon as Akai entered the kitchen, she saw a dried bonito (i.e., me) speaking and was speechless, but when Sugiura introduced me, her eyes instantly turned cold and she snorted *«Humph»*. Even if the other party is a teacher, the condescending eyes don't change. Akai Asuka is a true-born queen.

Naturally, I'm not planning to change my attitude just because of that either. There should have been many teachers who falter or have their complexion changed against her high-handed attitude silently exuded or the adult charm so unlike that of a high-school girl of about 17 years old, but me, I'm different.
[Rant]

I'm just a little surprised because of the words she abruptly said.

No way, it's really as Goubayashi has said.

"...And?"

Akai crosses her arms and says in a cold tone.

"You said to tell you if there's any worry, so I told you though?"

"Ahh, no.... Umu."

I got stuck on words but immediately clear my throat.

"Sugiura, could you please take along Honno-san and go outside for a bit?"

"All right. Call me if there's anything."

Since Sugiura immediately holds Honno-san and leaves the kitchen, remaining inside are just me and Akai.

A beautiful girl coldly glares at a huge like a wooden sword dried bonito . So surreal is this scene that I don't know if it's picturesque or not.

"Akai, I said to tell me if you have any worry. Is that matter of the transference incident what you're worrying about?"

"Well yeah."

Looking at her nails, Akai answers.

"It's not a very good feeling to keep silent while having others involved."

Words that jump out of her mouth are only things you can hardly believe. As I'm told, she is a natural born vampire, it seems that the original world is getting more difficult to live in, so they established a plan to transfer to a different world. Nevertheless, because anxiety remains in terms of war potential, they turned the students into monsters and try to incorporate them in to their own army.

Saying it like this is incomprehensible. I want to ask if you really intend to make use of me who reincarnated as a dried bonito as war potential.

"Well, sensei is, how should I put it, an irregular? You're sort of inconsequential in the original plan."

Is that how it is? I feel just a little down.

"Then,"

And, Akai continued.

"Washio is dead."

At that moment, the atmosphere inside the kitchen turns a little gloomy.

"I hate that sort of frivolous person. But a guy who didn't do anything wrong got involved because of me and died as a result."

Her way of telling the story is indifferent and cold as usual. A high-handed manner of speaking you can't feel any emotion from it. The girl named Akai Asuka is always like this.

But the subject she is speaking of is different from usual. I can catch a glimpse

of something that seems like weakness of her heart that only those who continue to push themselves will slightly revealed.

“I see,”

Even while I say that out loud, honestly, I’m absurdly confused.

As a teacher, I’m thinking about encouraging my depressed students. For example, if someone like Nekomiya thinks that Washio’s death is her fault, I plan to give a speech so as to get that guy back on her feet. But this confession is outside of my expectation. It’s much too heavy.

However, that Akai is suffering in front of me now, and at the same time I’m also starting to feel like running away. Even the Queen of 2nd year class 4 who can make adults tremble would show her weakness like this. Akai surely doesn’t trust me as a teacher. The reason why she’s expressing a bit of her true feeling here is probably because I’m a dried bonito. It may seem like muttering soliloquy to a wall in her mind.

“I talked to Sachi.”

“To Sakuma?”

“Yeah. Press for an answer, I talked.”

“I guess Sakuma wouldn’t have been angry.”

“Well yeah.”

Suddenly, a question comes to my mind. Why would Akai remain silent in the first place?

Why didn’t she tell the truth to her classmates?

When I ask about that, Akai return with «*Hah?*», loaded with irritation again.

“There’s no way I can say that. Everyone got involved, all because of me.”

“Are you afraid of being dislike by everyone in the class?”

“I don’t mean it like that.”

That’s a lie. I intuitively think. Akai actually is afraid of isolation.

“...Things like classmates,”

Although I haven’t even said anything, Akai immediately connected her words like making an excuse.

“I only think of them as tools to accomplish my objective.”

“Saying it like that, Akai, is certainly what you call pretense of evil.”

When I finish speaking, Akai severely glares at me.

“The cat is certainly out of the bag with this. Since you won’t be bother by your true feeling if you keep silent, I guess you’ve been doing that until now.”

“...Be quiet. Despite being just a dried bonito.”

“The one who endlessly grumbling to that dried bonito is you.”

I finally realize the reason why Akai is much more irritated than usual.

Akai has said that her classmates are *‘tools to accomplish her objective’*. That’s not her true feelings, but because there must have been an aspect that seem like that, that those words came out. This guy is using her classmate to accomplish her objective.

But she surely has a sense of belonging to the class inside her heart. It’s not limited to just students she’s close to like Sakuma or Okama. Akai can’t persist in being ruthless to the classmates whom she didn’t have any feelings for at first, starting with her follows such as Harui and Hebtsuka.

The gap between that fact and Akai’s true feelings is what irritating her right now. Looking at her like this, I understand that she’s a quite a lovely girl appropriate for her age.

Yes, Akai Asuka is a gentle child.

Well, there’s no such guy who is not gentle among my students though!

“Apparently Akai, the time has come for me to take off my skin.”

“Eh, what’s that?”

“Sugiura, shave meeeeeeeeeeee!!”

When I shout, Akai shoulders twitch a little.

“All right then—!”

Sugiura bursts into the kitchen with a full smile. This guys must have been waiting for her chance all this time.

Sugiura takes up the plane she said she purchased in the bazaar at the royal capital, and applies it on my body.

Ji~yori~, making that sound, one sheet of flaked bonito is shaved off from my body.

“GUAAAAAA!!”

“Ehh, what’s this. What are you doing?”

Akai raises a voice like she was drawing away from us. No, she may actually be drawing away.

I guess she would. It’s a familiar scene for us, but suddenly the homeroom teacher shouted to shave his own body and the student merrily started doing that, if looking from the side, it must have been the height of madness.

Sugiura throws my faked bonito into the pot and takes out the soup stock, then scooping it into a bowl, she hands it over to Akai.

“Akai-san, drink this. It’s soup stock taken from sensei.”

“Eh, no way...” [Rant]

Those words she said while being considerably stunned, therefore must have been her true feelings. Understanding that, my heart was deeply wounded.

“What soup stock, simply put, this is similar to sweats seeped out in the bath...”

“Moreover, it’s like sweats from scraps, isn’t it?”

Even Honno-san who stays silent until now says something unnecessary.

“Since it’s fine, drink it! The story won’t progress if you don’t drink it!”

“Then I drank it (in your dream). It was delicious. Yes, please continue.”

Akai is wholeheartedly frowning. It’s a kind of *au naturel* feeling different from being irritated. I’m happy as a teacher that Akai, who is always stifling her feelings under her iron face, is show such a feeling, but as a dried bonito, the fact that she has so much disgust toward my soup stock is truly sorrowful.

“Eh, let’s see, it’s okay! It’s okay Akai, I, uh, think you’re kind child at heart.”

“Ahh, yeah. Thanks sensei.”

Shit, her reaction is somewhat weak!

“Ah, it’s about that. If you think you’re sorry that you got everyone in the class involved, you should bow your head and apologize.... Because you’re a

gentle child, umm, that is, surely.... Surely everyone ... will forgive you, I think ... errr ... even Sakuma, should have forgiven you, right...?"

I'm gradually losing my confidence. Honno-san flipped through the book and open a page, wherein written «*Do your best! Do your best!*». Like I said, what's the heck is that supposed to be?

Akai crosses her arms for a while. Her expression is returning to the usual cold one.

"...That's all?"

"...That's all!"

"Something like that.... It doesn't resound in your heart at all..."

Glancingly, Akai move her gaze toward the bow Sugiura is holding.

"However, I don't understand what kind of idea you're going to use to connect from that soup stock to that story at all."

Um-u, as expected, the class queen is formidable.

Is it natural that there is a limit to my education policy of entrusting everything to momentum and the delicacy of soup stock...?

As I'm being stricken by my own powerlessness, Akai suddenly floats a little smile.

It's a natural smile like her strained heart has been liberated.

"Well, I understand. Sensei."

"Seriously!? Did you understand because of that just now!?"

"...Didn't you want me to understand?"

Akai, at the same moment, makes an amazed expression. Was this girl a child who can make various expressions like this? I was made to realized that I completely didn't know anything about Akai Asuka, attendance number 1 at all, even while being her homeroom teacher. She is not just a girl who looks down on adults with cold eyes.

"I too, probably, I think that I know what I have to do after this."

Akai undoes her crossed arms and says so.

"There's no way I can keep silent indefinitely, I have always thought that if I

keep dragging on, it will steadily become impossible to say and it's going to be the final line where I can say soon, but I just didn't have determination. I have always been thinking since I talked to Sachi."

"So that means I made that last push..."

"There's no way you are, isn't it?"

I'm told so clearly. I'm hurt.

"But I will say it. Say, apologize."

"Really..."

At the end of the day, this time for Akai may not have been much different from muttering soliloquy to a wall. She just wanted time to convince herself of the conclusion that was decided in her heart. Akai, unlike many other students, is a child who doesn't need advice from the self-important adults.

Nevertheless, it's no problem. Even in my standpoint as a teacher, I'm not conceited enough to think I can easily change the students' heart with my words. Plus, just by looking at the various faces of Akai makes this a valuable time for me.

Akai takes the bowl from Sugiura's hand and gulps down its content in one go.

"Ah."

"Ah..."

I and Sugiura speak at the same time.

"Thinking carefully, I have been sucking human's blood since childhood, so sweat or the like is trivial."

Kotori, the bowl which becomes empty, is put in the sink.

"But, it's not very delicious as expected."

"Re-really..."

"Well, I'll say it once. Thanks, sensei."

Saying so, Akai comes out from the kitchen. Her step is lighter than when she entered, the irritation has disappeared from her back.

"Akai-san has been sucking blood since childhood?"

Sugiura, while washing the bowl, mutters.

“Our world is wider than I thought.”

“That’s true, isn’t it.... A real vampire, that’s amazing! I wanted to hear more stories!”

Honno-san is awfully raising the tension, but for me, my heart being wounded by Akai’s single remark has yet to recover.

After that, Akai seems to have confessed everything to the class at the funeral place.

There are certainly students in opposition to Akai who kept silent about the circumstance up until now. Especially Hakuba who was on good term with Washio, has a momentum of flaring up at her. Nevertheless, with Akai honestly apologizing to the classmates and Ryuzaki or Goubayashi’s follow-up, etc., it ended without getting stormy.

Akai provided various information to the class, that information exert great influence to the new action guidelines and the usage of ability. In the end, what she seems to have been worrying about was needless anxiety.

Well, that’s good.

That’s really good.

“UOOOOO! Sugiura, more! Shave me more!”

“Ehh, still...? My hands are already tired...”

My screams echo in the kitchen. Sugiura shaves me and throws that in pots of various heat level.

The words that Akai has uttered at the end «*It’s not very delicious as expected*», has given a deep scar on my heart. I must not leave it like this. I have to become able to get out even more, more delicious soup stock. I makes great efforts such as growing mold throughout my body, etc., (high class dried bonito grows mold in its final stage of the manufacturing process), furthermore, I, together with Sugiura, am researching method to bring out even better soup stock.

Someday, I have to make that feigned *tsun* face say «*It’s delicious*». I have to make both my body and heart more thick (soup) with the thing called sensual delicacy boiling up from deep within my heart.

As a teacher, I understand that it's completely the worst spirit, but even so, I am burning with a sense of duty as a dried bonito.